

FOLLOW ME - COME AND SEE

Epiphany 2 year B

1 Sam. 3:1-10 (11-20); Ps. 139:1-6,13-18; 1 cor. 6:1-20; Jn. 1:43-51

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Jesus and Moses went golfing one day. Jesus was about to hit a shot and said, "Hey Moses, watch this! Just like Arnold Palmer!"

Moses said, "Jesus, you can do anything but don't try to be like Arnold Palmer."

Jesus said, "No, watch this - just like Arnold Palmer!"

Jesus hit the ball in the water so Jesus asked Moses to get the ball. Moses parted the water and got the ball. This continued for about fifteen minutes. Finally, Jesus hit the ball in the water for the seventh time.

"Please get my ball for me," Jesus asked Moses.

Moses said, "No, I told you to stop trying to be like Arnold Palmer so I'm not getting it this time."

So, Jesus himself walked across the water, reached down, and got his ball. While he was doing this, a couple rode by in a golf cart and said, "Who does he think he is, Jesus?"

Moses said, "No! He thinks he's Arnold Palmer!"

All of us can't be like Arnold Palmer, but we are told that all of us can be like Jesus! In fact, we have been called to be like Jesus - to love like Jesus - to make a difference like Jesus - to change the world like Jesus. The Bible says we have been empowered to be like Jesus.

Perhaps this is what compelled Philip and the rest of the disciples to drop everything and follow him. Jesus simply said to Philip, "Follow me" and he did, right on the spot (John 1:43). There was a great call of adventure and meaning in those two simple words of Jesus. Philip and the disciples couldn't resist.

Jesus' irresistible call is also seen later in the gospel of John: "You will do greater works than me because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12 paraphrased). How is it possible that we can do greater works than Jesus? Jesus has always been. In the first chapter of John we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But when Jesus was on earth in human form his influence was limited. He could only heal one person at a time and teach to groups at a time but when Jesus went back to the Father, his Holy Spirit came to live in each of his followers. In this way, Jesus' influence is multiplied through us and we can reach the whole world together! This is what Jesus means by doing greater works than him. We have been given power through the Holy Spirit to be like Jesus in this world. This is why our mission to make disciples is possible.

But how do we do that? Well, let's think about how information travels.

In the society in which we live, news travels quickly. In our world where my iPhone gives me a push notification from the Nine News network every time something newsworthy happens, this seems even more true. But even outside the world of the 24-hour news cycle, news still travels quickly. If you've ever worked in an office on a day when someone brings cupcakes and leaves them in the break room, you know what I'm talking about. News travels quickly, and good news travels even faster.

The Gospel of John from start to finish calls us to hear, believe, and share the Good News of Christ. John affirms this in writing that his Gospel was "written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31.) John's poetic and memorable prologue, which we heard on Christmas Day, uses beauty and imagery to call us into the Good News of Jesus, and today's lesson uses the witness of the Apostles to pull us in.

If we were to go back and read a bit before today's passage from John's account of the gospel, we see a pattern emerging which begins with John the Baptist. Upon seeing Jesus, John cries out, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36.) Andrew and an unnamed disciple follow—literally follow, as in walk after—Jesus, who invites them to "Come and see" (1:39.) Upon seeing, Andrew runs to his brother Simon and proclaims, "We have found the Messiah" (1:45.) Peter, whose interest has been piqued by his brother, then goes to meet Jesus and receives a new name.

Then we come to today's lesson, where we see a similar pattern. This time Jesus initiates by saying to Philip, "Follow me" (1:43.) Philip shares the Good News with Nathanael saying, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote"—in other words, the Messiah. When Nathanael balks, Philip offers the same invitation Jesus gave to Andrew and the unnamed disciple: "Come and see." Finally, Jesus furthers this invitation into the future by giving Nathanael a vision of what "you will see."

To put this retelling into a visual form, notice the patterns, parallels, and movements when we lay these verses out:

Look, here is the Lamb of God

Come and see

We have found the Messiah

Follow me

We have found [the Messiah]
Come and see
You will see

From John the Baptist's initial invitation to "look," multiple people are invited to look, see, proclaim, and invite. This pattern of spreading the Good News—of gosselling, I guess you could call it—leads not only to naming the truth of Jesus' messiahship, but leads to a revelation from Jesus of angels bridging the gap between heaven and earth (1:51).

And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Look! You will see!

This is truly amazing! Just by stating the plain truth revealed to him, John the Baptist set in motion events that transcend not only his own lifetime but the physical realms of heaven and earth!

Just as you running from the breakroom shouting "Yahoo!!!" from your pink-icing-covered lips and leaving a trail of cakey crumbs offers a foretaste of the free desserts left for all, John's proclamation leads people, even sceptics like Nathanael, to the Messiah who gives life to all.

"Where did you get those cupcakes?" a co-worker might ask.

"Woolworths," you reply.

"Can anything good come from Woolworths?"

Clearly, your co-worker has not tried one of the cupcakes.

Turning back to the story in John, it's quite interesting that of the two disciples who respond to John the Baptist's proclamation, only Andrew is named. Likewise, although Nathanael has a rather fleshed-out character in John's gospel, in the other three gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke), Nathanael is never mentioned. While some scholars suggest that the Nathanael in John's Gospel is the same as Bartholomew in the other accounts, there is nothing in the text itself to suggest that. Perhaps, the anonymity of Nathanael and, even more so, the anonymity of the disciple who went with Andrew tells us something about the role of discipleship.

To quote Lady Gaga (Who would have thought that would ever happen in one of *my* sermons?). Lady Gaga said, “I live for the applause, applause, applause.” The disciples, however, once they have brought others to Jesus, tend to fade away as Jesus becomes the focus. Sandra Schneiders, in her commentary on the gospel of John, notes that “there are no ‘second generation disciples’ in John, because all are bound to Jesus by his own word.”¹ While one might read this to mean that those who brought others to Jesus no longer matter nor need accolades because Jesus’ love outshines them, I think there’s actually something bigger going on.

Perhaps more than any body of literature in the Bible, the writings of John speak to the notion of community. While we refer to the author of the Gospel as John, we also know that the Gospel comes from the witness of the entire community. Each of us is beloved of Jesus because Jesus knows us and we know him. The apostolic witness of those like the unnamed disciple (probably John himself) and Nathanael, of whom we know very little, are not lost in the shadow of Jesus, but, rather, they are consumed in the light of Christ. Our very identity in Jesus changes our own identity as one of the bearers of the light of Christ. Simon is no longer Simon, but Peter. We are no longer our individual selves, but the beloved community of Christ.

Remembering the light of Christ which came into the world at Christmas and was revealed to the nations at Epiphany, I wonder how we will continue in the footsteps of the apostles.

Look!
Here is the Lamb of God!
Come and see!
We have found the Messiah!
Follow me!
We have found the Messiah!
Come and see!
You will see!

To Jesus Christ our Messiah, be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.

¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, Revised Edition (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 143.