

Seeing Even More

Ep 2 Yr B John 1:43-51 January 17, 2021
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I worked in a restaurant one summer in University and remember making soup for the lunch service. I had all the ingredients and followed the recipe to the letter, it looked perfect, and smelled delightful. I was about to tell the servers that it was ready when the cook came up behind me and asked “Did you try it?”

I stepped back and explained all the steps I had taken and how I had done everything exactly as required. She shook her head and pulled out two spoons and said “Try it.” I did. And discovered that it looked good and it smelled amazing and it really needed a bit more salt.

“Come and See.” Phillip says those words to his brother are telling him that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the promised one of Israel. Philip tells him to come and see because Nathaniel is dismissive that the long expected and hoped for Redeemer could come from such an unlikely place.

After all Nazareth isn't a center of power, education, or even piety. It is just an unimportant, quiet, and some would say backward part of the world. So when Phillip says the Messiah is from a place as unimpressive as Nazareth, Nathaniel is skeptical. And how Philip answers that uncertainty and scorn is important.

Because Phillip could have given his brother all sorts of reasons why he should believe that Jesus is the Messiah, he could have berated Nathaniel for his prejudice, he could have done lots of things to argue and try to convince the uncertain man. Yet instead Phillip does something else. He invites Nathaniel to decide for himself.

And I say ‘invites’ very deliberately. Because Phillip doesn't tell Nathaniel what to believe or even why he should believe but opens the way for him to make up his own mind. First Philip shares what he believes to be true, his excitement and his joy. And then he tells Nathaniel that he can discover the truth for himself by coming and seeing who Jesus is and what he is doing. Philip makes an offer to his skeptical brother and shows him a way to not simply know what Phillip knows but discover for himself who Jesus is and what God is doing through Jesus.

And that approach is important. Because sometimes we get excited when we come to an understanding and things make sense as they never have before. When we feel a connection deep in our hearts to God, we desperately want to share that with others.

So that they can experience what we're experiencing. So that they can know what we know. So they can feel the joy, the certainty, the hope that we feel. And we use words and our excitement to try and express what we have found in our lives.

And more often than not when we share our faith with others, or something we have found important, they don't automatically believe what we believe or see what we see. They question, they wonder, they doubt, and they may even outright reject what we are saying. And since we have shared something precious and important to us we may feel impatient, frustrated, or even angry at the other person for not believing us or trusting us.

And that is the exact situation that Phillip is in with his brother. Philip has shared his belief, his hope in Jesus and Nathaniel snaps back and dismisses him. But Phillip doesn't react to what is said. He doesn't berate, plead or even argue with Nathaniel. He simply invites. He tells his brother that he should come and see for himself.

And that is more than simply a way to respond to criticism or rejection from others. That is an acknowledgment that faith is deeper than words can explain and richer than ideas can express. Because the truth is that while there are things we need to understand about the faith and things we can study and learn we don't simply share our faith through ideas and concepts.

Which means that while there are arguments and wonderful intellectual discussions and conversations about faith and belief the fact is that we can't convince people with our words alone to believe in God. Because faith involves not just our heads but our hearts and our souls and spirits. Which is why we need to invite others to experience for themselves. Invite them to discover what it is that has us all excited, invite them to share in what is happening in our lives. We can ask them to come and see for themselves.

Now I'm not saying that there is no point in having conversations, in thinking about faith, or in learning, because the gospel lesson shows us that knowledge and understanding are a key part of belief. Remember when Phillip talks to his brother he tells him about Jesus being the Messiah, the Chosen one. Phillip understands not merely his Bible but how Jesus fits into the promises and prophecies. But that understanding only takes him so far. Or perhaps I should say that is only part of what is necessary to believe.

For faith is how we live in this world as God's people. We learn, we study not simply about the Bible but about history, society, and creation itself and all of that informs and shapes the way we express our faith and follow as disciples. For faith involves our heads but also our hearts and our hands. Which is why Phillips' invitation is so powerful and important. Because it opens the way for Nathaniel to come to God and experience the promise of Jesus for himself. Which actually brings me back to my story about soup.

In the kitchen that day I followed the recipe that the cook had left to the letter. I knew her soup was delicious and I followed exactly the steps she did. And after I followed all those steps the results looked good and smelled wonderful. But I hadn't tasted it, experienced it for myself which is why she gave me a spoon. And when I did I discovered something important. That there was something I had to contribute to make it even better.

And that is what happens when we or something curious comes and sees for themselves. Because after Philip offers the invitation and Nathaniel meets Jesus the skeptical brother comes to believe. But that isn't the end of our lesson. Because when he comes to believe Jesus challenges him to understand that coming to faith, believing in him is not the end but rather the beginning of something more, something deeper, something life-changing.

For Jesus never says I am the destination come to me and then you are done in your faith. We don't come to believe and hope in Jesus and then our faith is finished. No, Jesus says follow me so when we come to Jesus we are just beginning our journey of faith, we trust and grow and then discover that there is a deeper, a richer, a more profound and mature faith beginning in our lives. For when we pray, when we read the Bible, when we worship and serve we begin to see the world differently and we start to see ourselves differently.

For when we live in faith we discover not merely what other people have told us, the rich tradition and understanding of Christianity which is found all around us, but we connect all of those things and more to our lives and our world. And we begin to better understand and know what God is calling us to do and be as followers of Jesus. For when we come and see and when we invite others we build even more the kingdom of heaven here on earth through our words, our witness and our actions of faith.