

Calling Disciples

We move quickly from the baby Jesus to the young Rabbi, 30 years old, baptized in Judea in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Mark begins his Gospel telling us about the Baptist; Jesus' baptism is recorded in the 9th verse of Mark's 1st chapter. John introduces us to the Baptist in verse 19 of his 1st chapter, after beginning with the Prologue announcing the "Word made flesh".

Only John tells us that the first disciples Jesus calls were disciples of the Baptist. Two parallel stories close out John's first chapter: John and Andrew following and visiting with Jesus, and, then, Andrew bringing his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus; and today's Gospel, the call to Philip and Nathanael.

Jesus invites the first two disciples by saying, "Come and See." Philip replies to Nathanael's doubt by saying, "Come and see..." Andrew finds Peter; Jesus finds Philip; Philip finds Nathanael. Here is the same method for us, today's Church, in trying to make disciples, invite ("...come and see;), find, bring... We say in our mission statement that we are a school for discipleship, our work is making disciples, calling disciples, encouraging and strengthening disciples. We do this in a variety of ways. Of course, it starts with the sacrament of Baptism (today we have 2 baptisms). Most of us are baptized as babies, young children. It's up to parents, Godparents, to bring their children to Christ through the Church.

All of our efforts at Christian education, youth ministry, acolytes, choir, outreach, are designed to help our young people and adults grow into discipleship. Many adults come to us seeking a deeper life in Christ --- our worship, our fellowship, our stewardship as well as programs in pastoral care, education and outreach exist to help us follow Jesus.

In John's Gospel, Jesus has not yet done any miracles, he's not used any teaching or healing to show his disciples who he is --- they seem to know, just by being in his presence, and from what their mentor, John the Baptist, says about Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world ... the Spirit descended as a dove from heaven and rested on him... he baptizes with the Holy Spirit..."

Andrew tells Peter, "We have found the Messiah." Philip tells Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and prophets wrote..." Nathanael proclaims, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel..."

As we seek to call ourselves and others to a truly committed discipleship, we need to understand this is a gradual process, it takes years; it may take an entire life. The Gospels show us that the disciples grow in their understanding --- during Jesus' earthly ministry and after his Resurrection. By the time John wrote his Gospel, some 50 or 60 years after the Resurrection, the early Church had seen the power of the Holy Spirit at work.

This process of discipleship has 4 clear stages: revelation, doubt, invitation, discovery. Each one of us moves continually through these stages all during our lives. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael experienced a revelation of God's glory in Jesus, profoundly different from the angels, shepherds, and Wise men we've spent the last couple of weeks with. Where, how does God give us a revelation of love and glory?

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asks. It's the first of many questions. Sometimes these questions lead to doubt, unbelief. John shares two other statements of doubt later in his narrative: Pilate asking Jesus, "So you are a King?" and Thomas saying to the other disciples, "Unless I see, I will not believe". Questions, dealing with doubt are a necessary reality for all of us.

This is why we continue to share the invitation, "Come and see." Do you have Church? Would you like to visit Grace? How is God calling you? Have you considered a new ministry: Vestry, choir, outreach, teaching, serving? Our evangelism and newcomer ministries are vital --- not just for our membership and financial health. They are vital because we are inviting people to know and to share God's love.

Finally, discovery. We have found: God in Christ, a faithful community where we can worship and serve, a purpose to sustain our life, knowledge that love is stronger than death. Martin Luther King shows us the way. He answered the call. He shared the call. His dream for true discipleship in civil rights became a reality.

When Jesus told the first disciples to come and see, we already know from John's opening verses what they would find --- life, light, power to become children of God, grace, truth, glory, God, love. This is the invitation we have answered, now we share it with others. This is the call that has brought us to Grace Church and it's the call Grace Church gives in this new calendar year, and every year, every day. "Come and See".