

John 1:43-51

Can anything good come from Nazareth?

Phillip announces that Jesus may be the one. Nathaneal expresses doubt.

Phillip INVITES. Come and see.

The sermon this morning speaks to a concern which I have heard voiced several times recently. A concern for church growth. And this morning we see models of Jesus calling new followers.

First, Jesus calls Phillip. Just that. Boom. He goes. Then it becomes more interesting.

Phillip says to Nathaneal, I think I have found the One (God's Messiah). Nathaneal expresses doubt. And here comes the first lesson of the morning: Phillip invites. Just that. Invites. Come. (and) See.

The church has become so jaded by its association with power – ever since that terrible day in the third century when Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman empire – that we are poisoned by the concern with whether someone has the answer right. We don't invite. We tell the answer and then prepare to accost anyone who doesn't make the official subscription.

In contrast. Jesus invites. Phillip invites on Jesus behalf.

Come. See.

The Second thing that happens is that Jesus names Nathaneal. By this I mean he describes Nathaneal in such a way that Nathaneal knows that Jesus knows who he is (and still cares) (This pattern is seen in the story of the woman at the well – in chapter 4 and she becomes the first evangelist AND when she evangelizes she does it with a variation of Phillips question – could this be the one?)

Now this naming, this knowing the person and loving them anyway is a fundamental and powerful part of grace. Accepting the person as they are SETS THE STAGE for them to step into what God wants them to become.

We don't have the source of Jesus knowledge – but we do have a tool which is parallel. Listening.

Listening is a terribly powerful tool. And very much under used. We are drawn so often to telling the answer. But **listening validates the seeker**. It acknowledges the person where they are – which sets the stage so that they can move on.

I had a powerful experience of listening just a year ago. Last year I spent January driving through the blizzards to attend eleven meetings with a congregation which was in conflict. Now in the

course of these meetings – in each one – there arrived a moment when I tried to offer a different way of looking at things. One time in each hour of meeting. How many of these alternate perspectives were acknowledged? NONE. Not one. (so much for sharing the answer with others.) But after the meetings 27 of 99 people came forward to proclaim **how important it was** that someone/the Presbytery was **listening** to them.

If anything allowed them to move forward – it was the listening. It validated them – then maybe they could move on.

The second trait which is powerful is encouragement. Encourage one another. While critical perspective (offering an answer) may seem a logical way to move forward, the nature of our human journey is that encouragement - strengthening is the effective means for moving ahead.

What would be the effect if the church became a community of encouragement? I think the effect could be boundless. As boundless as God's love. As boundless as the movement of God's Spirit in our lives in faith and faithfulness.

In the weeks ahead we will be looking at questions of church growth. The gospel account shows us something more powerful than a church growth consultant – the model of invitation, and the practices of listening and encouragement.