

## “Come and See” - Jan. 14, 2024

### Second Sunday after the Epiphany

#### (John 1:43-51)

*43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49 Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50 Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 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.” (NRSV)*

Martin Luther King Jr. was seated in a huge jet at O’Hare Field in Chicago. He was traveling to Oslo, Norway, to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. In a moment, the mighty plane was to take off for Los Angeles. However, from the speaker, the passengers heard the announcement that there would be a delay. There were some mechanical problems. Looking out of the window, King saw half a dozen men approaching the plane to fix it. They were the ground crew.

Later, after being honored in Norway, someone asked King, “How does it feel to win the Nobel Peace Prize?” King answered that the Nobel Prize should be a testimony to the many ground crews, that is, “fifty thousand [black people] in Montgomery, Alabama, who marched together on Washington and stood up for the true American Dream.” King said, “It is these ‘noble’ people who have won this Nobel Prize.”<sup>1</sup>

King became a pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1953, when he was 24 years old. In 1955, when Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man, King was actively involved in leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It was momentous for King to be fully committed to the prophetic, nonviolent Kingdom movement, believing that we can foretaste and build the Kingdom of God not through hate and violence but through justice, love, and peace.

---

<sup>1</sup> Clayborne Carson, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*; Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford Univ. (<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/institute/king-institute>)

I like King's prayer that shows his lifelong guidepost was God: "Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself." King believed and envisioned the "Beloved Community" as the goal for a local and global society in which poverty, bigotry, racism, and all forms of discrimination are replaced by an inclusive and mutually embracing spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.

King learned the Kingdom value from Jesus. Instead of choosing the elite, wealthy, and persons in power, Jesus called those who were poor, marginalized, powerless, and victimized to be his disciples. Many of them were also looked down on as ritually unclean. If you read the Bible carefully, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus called disciples to follow him. In John, disciples often *discovered* Jesus. We may say that they found hope and responded to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God.

In today's reading, Philip told Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Philip appears only in lists of the twelve disciples, but in John's Gospel, Philip's role is markedly different and much more significant (6:5-7; 12:20-22; 14:8-9).

Upon hearing Philip's invitation, Nathanael reacted as if it was nonsense. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Like doubting Thomas, Nathanael began his conversation with doubt, but his doubting was not ignored or discredited. In this way, John reminds us that witnessing is about inviting—witnessing shouldn't be about arguing, coercing, or laughing at doubt.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of explaining anything further, Philip invited Nathanael to experience Jesus personally, saying, "Come and see. See for yourself!" When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, Jesus praised him as a model Israelite, who would convey authentic faith.

Jesus said, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is nothing false!" Jesus already knew Nathanael and saw his heart through and through. Nathanael was amazed and asked, "How do you know me?"

Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." We have no clue about the significance of the fig tree, but we can assume that Nathanael was very impressed by Jesus' "superhuman knowledge," declaring, "Rabbi, you

---

<sup>2</sup> *Preaching through the Christian Year B.*

are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”<sup>3</sup> In John’s Gospel, “Son of God” becomes the central confession and identity about who Jesus is. Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

Jesus continued to say to Nathanael: “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,” implying Jesus himself is “the one who bridges the distance between heaven and earth.” (cf. 3:13; 6:62).<sup>4</sup> If I add a Greek word, “Very truly, I tell you!” becomes “Amen, Amen, I tell you!” “Amen” in the beginning of the sentence means “surely, or truly.” When it comes to the end of the sentence, it means, “let it be so,” or “may it be fulfilled.”

Interestingly, the “you” to whom Jesus speaks here is not a singular but a plural “you,” indicating that Jesus is speaking to a wider audience than Nathanael. The Gospel of John invites not only Nathanael but also the Johannine community of faith and you and me to follow Jesus who reveals and embodies God’s self-emptying and reconciling love on earth.<sup>5</sup> After meeting Jesus, a skeptical man, Nathanael, who said, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” became a bold disciple of Jesus who confessed Him as the Son of God.

As Philip invited Nathanael to experience Jesus personally, we are also called to “Come and See” and continue to seek and follow Jesus. We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ who follow and foretaste the Kingdom life Jesus taught and lived out, and that Martin Luther King Jr. always envisioned.

Do you remember the reason why you said “yes” to Jesus? Many church members in the US and worldwide confess that they have forgotten the reasons, and they have stopped growing as disciples. How about us? Are we still on the path of discipleship that is a life-long journey of maturing?

Many Methodists, including us, recite that “the mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” as if it is a catchphrase or bumper sticker. As a matter of fact, it is the common mission statement of all who are called Methodists. A statement not only to be memorized

---

<sup>3</sup> *New Interpreter’s Bible.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid;* Gerard Sloyan, *Interpretation*; Lamar Williamson Jr., *Preaching the Gospel of John*. John pictures Jesus as the one who becomes the locus “where the earthly and the heavenly, divine and human, temporal and eternal meet.” (Gail)

and confessed, but a statement to be lived out as a “healthy, disciple-making congregation.”

To become a healthy, disciple-making congregation, we are especially encouraged to practice two things: First, we need to continually grow as individual disciples of Jesus Christ. Second, we must pray and think intentionally about how our church’s ministries work together to assist in disciple formation.<sup>6</sup> To do so, we need to reconnect with our *Why* as followers of Jesus.

Let us be reminded of the most basic steps to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. When we become a United Methodist church member, we vow to faithfully participate in the life and ministries of our local congregation through (1) our prayers, (2) presence, (3) gifts, (4) service, and (5) witness. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we will need to ask how we can go beyond the words we profess to actually living these vows? We will continue to revisit these vows, digging and practicing in depth.

When we can rediscover and reconnect with our “Why,” our church life will give us the joy of becoming and growing together as disciples of Jesus Christ. In all seasons of our personal and congregational lives, let us continue to pray, inviting the Spirit of the living God to flower in our inner gardens. Let us continue to pray, imagining ourselves to become a more vital congregation where we learn how to respect, embrace, and encourage one another, dreaming and working together for the Kingdom of God--the Kingdom where justice rolls down like water and love like an ever-flowing stream.<sup>7</sup>

While praying more, hoping more, trusting God’s caring hands, and listening mindfully to one another, we can grow strong, not because we are strong enough, but because Jesus bears our weaknesses. This morning, I invite you to remember why you said yes to the Lord’s invitation, “Come and See.” As we continue to walk and grow together, God will welcome and accompany us with a big smile, eventually awarding us a heavenly Prize. And all God’s people say, Amen!

---

<sup>6</sup> Junius B. Dotson, *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations*

<sup>7</sup> Amos 5:24 modified.