

Finding, Following, and Seeing

a sermon

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January 14, 2018

John 1:43–51

Nathaniel wasn't sure about this.

His friend Philip had found him to tell him, with great excitement, about Jesus. Philip believed that Jesus was the one, the expected and promised Messiah. For Jesus had found Philip, and told him, "Follow me." And just like that ... Philip followed Jesus.

And now Philip comes to Nathaniel to tell him about Jesus, to tell him that Nathaniel, too, should follow Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth.

Nathaniel wasn't sure about this.

I mean, *Nazareth*.

Eew.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" asks Nathaniel.

The words almost drip with contempt. They're bathed in bias, steeped in prejudice. What good can come from Nazareth? *Nazareth!*

Certainly no one of importance,
no one who could make a difference,
no prophet,
no promised one of God.

Nazareth, I've learned, was so insignificant, so unimportant in those days, that it was not even included on a Roman map. It was Nowheresville. It was Podunk. And so it was ignored, neglected, rejected, and apparently despised ... as was anyone who came from that place.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

So, Nathaniel wasn't sure about this, wasn't sure about what Philip told him, wasn't sure about Jesus, wasn't sure whether Jesus could really be who Philip said he was.

In this, Nathaniel was among the first of a great many through the centuries, even or especially today, who have a resistance to Jesus based in prejudice and bias, who show that preconceptions are often a significant barrier to accepting him.

Where he comes from is a problem.

The people who are his are a problem.

Their (perceived, imagined, stereotyped) poverty and weakness and backwardness, these are a problem.

Who wants to follow someone who comes from *that*?

Because, sooner or later, he'll have you following him to *meet* those people, to see them in their weakness and poverty, to find them where they are. Who knows what you'll then see? Who knows what you'll then do?

But Philip doesn't give up. Philip,

who was found by Jesus and then followed him,
who had found Nathaniel and then was trying to get him to follow Jesus,

gives an answer to this prejudice that is short, elegant, and winsome: “Come and see.”

“Come and see.” Not argument, but welcome.

“Come and see.” Not refutation, but invitation.

“Come and see.” Not pressure, but engagement.

When Nathaniel meets Jesus, Jesus has seen him coming.

From quite some distance, he has seen him coming.

For quite some time, he has seen him coming.

Somehow, Jesus already knows Nathaniel: his character, his heart.

It’s as if Nathaniel’s story is an open book to Jesus, and Jesus has lovingly read that book from cover to cover.

Which, of course, he has.

Astonished, Nathaniel professes his faith in Jesus. His bias abandoned, his prejudice forgotten, Nathaniel now sees Jesus as the Son of God, as his long awaited king.

And then Jesus, with delight in Nathaniel, promises that he will see even greater things.

For when Jesus finds you, and has you follow him, what you see and *how* you see will radically change. Within the love of Jesus, the finding, the following, and the seeing become a holy circle that moves and grows, leading the disciple of Jesus to join him and seek to be more and more like him, within the finding, the following, and the seeing.



But entering that circle is no easy thing. For many have an innate resistance to it.

The *finding* is tough for many, because they think they don’t need finding. They’re not lost. They’ve got it all together. They are where they need to be. And to be the ones *found*, rather than being the *finders*, well that rubs against our dearest myths of strength and self-actualization.

We don’t want to be found. We want to *find*. That sounds stronger. That sounds more fun. Finders are winners. Those who must be found, who must be rescued and saved, they are losers.

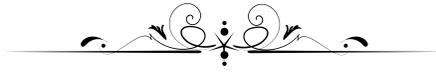
And much of what passes for evangelicalism easily speaks of “finding Jesus,” as if conversion were an accomplishment and faith were an achievement.

Yet Jesus first finds Philip, and only then can Philip say that he has found Jesus. In verse 43, at the start of this passage, it says: Jesus “found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’” And then, a little bit later, in verse 45, it says this: “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found ... Jesus....’”

So it is that much of what needs to happen in the hearts of many, including many who claim to believe in Jesus, is a finding of yourself as made possible and empowered by Jesus first finding you, and then you finding him.

And I tell you, when he finds you, and you know that he has found you, it’s as if your story is an open book to Jesus, and Jesus has lovingly read that book from cover to cover.

Which, of course, he has.



The *following*, too, is tough for many. Because this Jesus who says “follow me,” well, he comes from places we don’t like, and he *goes* to places we don’t like.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Sooner or later, the Jesus who says “follow me” will have you following him to *those* places, to *those* people, to see them and be with them in their weakness and poverty and shame ... or as we have imagined them to be,

as our prejudice packages them,
as our bias binds them,
as our false-seeing has us see right past them.

Yeah, Jesus who calls us to follow might lead us to follow where it is uncomfortable for us to go.

To which I can only say, you bet ’ya!

In Nathaniel’s prejudiced words, we learn that Jesus is identified

with poverty,
with weakness,
with humble origins,
with a people of no account,
with the overlooked,
with those for whom the welcome mat is hastily withdrawn,
or never put out in the first place.

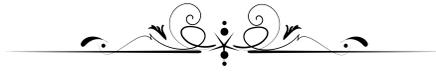
And the thing is, Jesus never rejects that identification. His entire ministry, his very life, is one in which he willingly identifies

with the lowly,
with the powerless,
with those who were dismissed,
with those about whom horrible things were said,
with those who were the objects of prejudice
and the victims of bias.

And when Jesus says “Follow me,” do you really expect that he is going to lead you *away* from such people?

The sad thing is, this resistance to following Jesus is present even among a good many people who identify as Christians. For many, being a Christian is entirely passive. It is only receptive (yet, of course, a receptivity that is limited in range and meaning). The finding is there, but not the following. For many, being a Christian is all about receiving from Jesus, and hardly at all about actively answering his call to follow him. There is very little sense that *we*

are to go where he goes,
are to join him in his work,
are to walk where and with whom he walks.



And then there's the *seeing*. Those whom Jesus finds, and has follow him, he then makes them see ... the Nazarenes,

the lowly,
the weak,
the powerless,

see them as the beautiful people he sees them to be, loved and blessed and accepted. Those whom he has found and whom he makes follow, he has them see others *as they really are*, not as our prejudices have made them appear to be.

This is the *seeing* that Christ brings, in a circle of love with the finding and following. And it, too, is hard. For many prefer blindness to sight, darkness to light. They would rather continue seeing others as the two dimensional cartoons of danger and threat they've always imagined, rather than as those

who are likewise loved by Jesus,
likewise called by Jesus,
likewise blessed and empowered and gifted by Jesus.

I think I know why. I think the change in seeing that Jesus both requires and enables is scary. I think that to see the stranger and the one from a background strange to you as Jesus sees them will mean that you will come to see *yourself* as one who is in such need of the love that Jesus has for you.

Yes, you! who on your own is simply *not* the marvelous person you have always wanted and tried to picture.

You will see in yourself the good *and* the bad, the beautiful *and* the ugly.

You will see that the best of you is the worst of you, *and* ... the worst of you is the best of you, and somehow, for some reason, God in Christ forgives it all and lifts it all far higher than you ever could on your own.

That's what you can see. And this can be disorienting. It can be painful.
But it can, it will, be beautiful.



When Jesus finds you, he calls you to follow. And then he changes how you see. Your perception of him, of yourself, of others: this all will change. This all *must* change. In the change, you become part of his work of finding people and asking them to follow and see.

A Christian faith that has no finding, no following, no seeing new things, no seeing old things with new insight, is barely faith and hardly Christian.

But truly are we blessed

when we know that we are found by Jesus,
when we follow him wherever he goes,
when we see life with new eyes.

My friends, may we all know and celebrate that very blessing, the finding and following and seeing that Jesus calls forth, that Jesus gives.