

Epiphany 2, January 17, 2021, Sermon (Jn 1:43-50; Ps 139; I Sam 3:1-10)

The holy gospel according to John, the 1st chapter (1:43-50)

The next day (3 days after being baptized by John) ***Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.***

Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.

Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”

This is the gospel of our Lord.

How I would love to fill this sermon with all the gospel promises of hope, and peace, and joy, and blessing, to focus on the eternal: not only “till the end” eternal, but also “from the beginning” eternal that we read in Psalm 139: ***It was you who formed my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. . . . In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed*** (Ps 139:13, 15, 16b). No other religion has ever worshiped a God who cared so deeply and intimately for his people that he not only created them in and for love, but also *became* one of them (us) in order to draw us to himself.

I would love to simply re-state the glorious words of mercy and forgiveness that promise unconditional love for all who seek Him who loved us so much, he died for us. In fact, he died also for those who *don’t* seek him: ***I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me*** (Isaiah 10:20). And one more passage that I cling to: ***Christ died for us while we were still sinners*** (Romans 5:8).

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I would love to write a whole sermon on those fundamental beliefs of our faith. But I am “a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ” (part of the *Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness* which we share at the beginning of our worship time together; LBW p. 77, ELW p. 96). And as such, I am called to *speak the truth in love*.

January 6th is the date on which the Church celebrates Epiphany, the day when Jesus (no older than two) was revealed as God-in-the-flesh to gentiles (non-Jews). That day the Magi, the Wise Men from the east, worshiped the King of the Jews after following a star to Bethlehem.

On that date last Wednesday there was a terrifying and deadly assault on the Capitol in Washington, D.C. This was the culmination of the great and growing divide that has existed in the United States for many years and has become more deadly since 2016.

And it seems now, a week later, that—as is usually the case—violence has solved nothing and is likely to continue into state capitols and next week’s inauguration.

Where is God in all this? He is Emmanuel, God-with-us (Matthew 1:23). (In Hebrew “emmanu” means “with us,” and “el” means God.) He has promised to be with us always, even to the end of the ages (Matthew 28:20). He is Jesus, which means “Savior.” He will save us *from* our sins, and save us *for* his eternal kingdom—if we let him.

We “celebrated” Christmas, the birth of the Christ child, less than a month ago. We read the precious story of God’s decision to take on our human life, to exchange his divinity for our human nature. We look back on all of “holy history,” the entire revelation of God’s-self to us, his most beloved creatures, in his Word, the Bible.

And as we read and review that holy history, we find again and again that betrayal and violence have always been a part of God’s good creation. Life in Eden ended when God, the Father of all, allowed Adam and Eve to make their own choices, and they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17) and were banished by God’s love. But wherever they wandered, however far, God remained with them always. And God remains with *us*, always. Remember, he *died* in order to do that.

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What can we do as Christ-followers to move forward? How can we find a Christ-like way through the chaos?

We can pray. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, please pray. Pray for the healing of our nation, pray for racial justice, pray for the peaceful transfer of power, pray for the Biden/Harris administration, pray for all who grieve over all these circumstances.

Pray for all who have believed the President and find it difficult to accept a new truth. During his Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”** (John 14:6). Mere hours later Pilate, Roman governor of Judea (where Jerusalem is), said to Jesus, **“So you are a king?”** Jesus answered, **“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice”** (John 18:37).

This week’s scripture texts speak to us. Young Samuel, dedicated by his mother to the Lord before his birth, prayed, **“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”** My daily prayer is, “Speak, Lord, and teach your servant to listen.” *What will we hear if we actually listen for God? How might God “make the rough places plain”* (Isaiah 40:4)?

In today’s text from John and the section before it, we hear Jesus telling two of John’s disciples, **“Come and see.”** A few verses later Jesus finds Philip and tells him, **“Follow me.”** Today, perhaps more than at any other time in our lives, we need Jesus, who offers himself as the One who is **“the way, and the truth, and the life”** without whom no one can come to the Father (John 14:6).

I don’t believe it’s coincidence that these particular verses are part of the assigned readings for this particular week. If we read the scriptures faithfully—with faith—we will find what we need for our present circumstances, whatever they may be.

What can we do as Christ-followers to move forward? How can we find a Christ-like way through the chaos? Jesus says, **“Follow me.”** Read the words (public domain) of a familiar hymn (or sing it if you remember the melody)

***You are the way; through you alone can we the Father find;
In you, O Christ, has God revealed his heart, his will, his mind!***

***You are the truth; your Word alone true wisdom can impart;
You only can inform the mind and purify the heart.***

***You are the life; the rending tomb proclaims your conquering arm;
And those who put their trust in you not death nor hell shall harm.***

***You are the way, the truth, the life; grant us that way to know,
That truth to keep, that life to win, whose joys eternal flow.***

This final thought came from my mother (who is almost 100!) when I discussed this sermon with her. She reminded me of another passage in John's gospel: Jesus was discussing some difficult theology with "the Jews" and his disciples: **"those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them"** (John 6:56). Even his disciples were troubled by this, and many of them **"turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"**

When all is said and done, our task, it seems, is to obey Jesus' words from John, the Good News of God in Jesus Christ:

**Come and see.
Follow me.
I am the way, and the truth, and the life.**

Thanks be to God!