

SERMON
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Called to Adventure! (Part 1: the Light)

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1 Samuel 3:1-10 & John 1:43-51

I remember when I was a little girl growing up. One of the favorite things we would do as a family would go for car rides into the countryside. My Mom, my Dad, my three siblings and I would all climb into the car – I was the youngest, so I was normally squashed in the middle of the back seat – it was before the days when we had seat belts in the back and regulations about the number of passengers – it was also before the days of air conditioning in the car, so I always remember it was a bit stuffy, even in England. But we would drive off along the country roads on an adventure. We would usually end up at some National Trust Park or at a State Home, but my Dad would never tell us where we were going – it became a bit of a guessing game between my siblings and I. There was something exciting about not knowing where the journey would lead us.

I think that sense of adventure continued with me as I grew up – as a student at University I took many trips across Europe, back packing and even hitch hiking with friends. We'd have a rough plan of what we wanted to see and do, but we were always willing to head off in a different direction if we heard about something interesting, or met someone exciting.

I think those childhood memories are a little bit like our scripture story today. The text suggests to us that Philip had heard about Jesus before he met him - probably from Andrew or Peter since he was from the same town as them. We don't know what he had heard, but clearly it was something exciting, since Philip it filled with enthusiasm and immediately tells Nathaniel to "Come and See". Now Nathaniel is not so convinced. Nathaniel reminds me of my oldest sister who is 9 years older than me, and when we would go on those car adventures as a family, she would normally get in the car reluctantly, moaning with a teenage attitude: "Do we have to?" And Nathaniel is a bit like that. You can imagine him whining as he says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

But suddenly Nathaniel's attitude changes. When Jesus tells Nathanael that he saw him already sitting under the tree, Nathanael is so impressed that he impetuously calls him the "Son of God" and the "King of Israel."

What was there about Jesus to have this kind of effect on people? In a couple of weeks, we will be talking about the authority of Jesus – perhaps that is why people followed him. Or was there something about his manner that was so engaging that made Nathaniel suddenly change his mind? Without doubt there was something about Jesus that drew people to him - something magnetic about Jesus' personality to have such an immediate effect on people.

The Gospels are full of stories that tell us about the profound effect Jesus had when he met people: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26), the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10), the woman at the Pharisee's home (Luke 7:36-50), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the woman at the well (John 4), the sick man at the pool (John 5:1-9), the thief crucified next to Jesus (Luke 23:40-43), and the centurion at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47) – and the examples go on and on. People meet Jesus, and they were changed. Whatever their deepest need was, Jesus met it.

And then, then they go and tell others what happened. This text tells how it works. Philip is so excited about finding Jesus “the one Moses wrote about in the Law” that he immediately goes and tells Nathaniel. The Christian faith is passed from person to person. From Philip to Nathaniel. That’s how it started with Jesus, and that’s how it has worked ever since, for 2,000-plus years.

The spread of the Christian church across the world is a person-to-person story. People telling their stories of what God has done and is doing in their lives. Sometimes that story is told in the form of a book that makes you think; sometimes it is a story or message that you might hear from the pulpit; sometimes it may even be a message that you hear directly from God, like Samuel in our Old Testament scripture today. Or sometimes you hear the story by watching what God is doing in someone else’s life – someone who was willing to go on the call to adventure with God.

As I was looking through our church library last week, I came across a book called “The Adventures” – it is about ordinary people with special callings. People who were willing to risk their careers, their friendships, their family ties, and in some cases even their lives because they believed there was something that God wanted them to do. People like St Francis, Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Mother Teresa. People that all dramatically proved that following Christ is an adventure.

We don’t know exactly where our journeys of faith will take us. Just like I didn’t know where my childhood adventures would end up. We don’t know about any ups and downs on the way. That is kind of what makes it an adventure. But we do know that if we choose to listen to the call of adventure, then through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is with us on the adventure.

Our task as Christians is not to “prove” the truth of the Christian faith, although many scholars have written persuasively of the truth of Christianity. Our task is not even to persuade others to become Christian. Our task is to simply say, “Come and see.” “Come and join the adventure!”

Philip could have given Nathanael some of his own opinions. He could have said, “This Jesus knows a lot about the Bible.” Or he might have said,

“There is something about this man Jesus that draws me to him.”

Even when Nathanael expressed skepticism about “anything good coming out of Nazareth,” Philip might have listed some successful people from Nazareth.

But no: Philip simply said, “Come and see.”

That now becomes our task, to tell people, “Come and see.” Come and see what the Holy Spirit can do in your life. In the United Church we are not always that comfortable talking to others about our faith – we are perhaps more comfortable showing our faith in our actions. And actions are important. But, the Christian story is one that has **been told** from person to person. If we don’t tell people, then we are not listening to our call to be disciples. At the Messy Church conference recently, I heard a speaker say – “When you go into a shoe store you expect to talk about shoes – so when you go into a church, you should expect to talk about God.”

So, let us take a moment to turn the person next to you, or behind you, and talk to them about God. Share with them your story:

- Have you felt God call you to adventure?
- What have you discovered about yourself, or about the world?
- What have you discovered about God?