

father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working'
(John 5:17). He still is.

Making disciples one conversation at a time / D. Michael Henderson, 2006

Related topics

For further study:

Mission; discipleship; vocation; belief

Closing Prayer

God of wonderful knowledge,
whose voice calls each of us by name;
you confound our expectation
by revealing yourself to the lowly.
Confound also our fear,
that we may not be afraid
to face the powerful of this earth
with your word of judgement,
in the sure knowledge
that nothing spoken in your name will be lost.
We make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Celebrating the Christian Year, Epiphany 2, Year B*³

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³ *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

(Sunday between 14 and 20 January inclusive)

Principal Service readings

1 Samuel 3.1-10 [11-20] God calls Samuel
Psalm 139.1-5, 12-18 [or 139.1-9] In praise of God's greatness
Revelation 5.1-10 Vision of worship in heaven
John 1.43-51 Jesus calls Philip and prophesies to Nathanael

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip 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.' ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' ⁵⁰Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' ⁵¹And 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.'

John 1.43-51 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Today's reading from John is part of the calling of disciples. It is introduced by the phrase, 'The next day ...' (1.43). This is the fourth day, the final day of general preparation,² in which Jesus takes the initiative in calling disciples and revealing something about himself. Jesus is shown to be decisive – he goes to Galilee, he finds Philip, and he says to him, 'follow me' (1.43). Philip follows because he is called by Jesus. Philip, like Andrew and Peter (cf. Mark 1.16-20; Luke 5.1-11), is from Bethsaida in Galilee, and this gathering of disciples travels to Galilee, for the wedding at Cana (2.1-11).

Philip shares his understanding of Jesus with another potential disciple, Nathanael, but he is not quite honest when he says, 'We have found ...' as he had actually been found by Jesus. Philip expresses the traditional hope of the people in describing Jesus as 'him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote' (1.45). In a sense, as with Andrew's confession (cf. 1.41) these words are true, but Philip doesn't fully understand their meaning. He describes Jesus as 'Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph' (1.45), which shows his limited understanding, for Jesus is the Son of God and the Lamb of God. Indeed, Nathanael's question, citing a proverb of the time, 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (1.46), points to the weakness in Philip's understanding. The attitude of John's gospel is to insist that the believer looks beyond historical origins. Philip tells Nathanael to come and see for himself (1.46).

Nathanael does not come to faith by meeting Jesus. Jesus has seen him first, and greets him as an Israelite without guile (cf. Psalm 32.2; Isaiah 53.9). Nathanael omits any greeting of respect or honour and asks straight away how Jesus got to know him (1.48). What are the origins of Jesus' knowledge? Jesus tells him that he saw him under a fig tree before Philip called him (1.48). The sign of knowledge marks Jesus as a wonder-worker, and moves Nathanael to salute Jesus, 'Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel' (1.49). Nathanael now addresses Jesus as 'Rabbi', a term of honour, and uses the titles 'son of God' and 'king of

² The first day was 1.19-28, where the Baptist points towards another; the second was 1.29-34, where the Baptist witnesses to the Lamb of God; the third was 1.35-42, where some disciples of the Baptist 'follow' Jesus.

Israel', titles that come from Nathanael's tradition (see 2 Samuel 7.14; Psalm 2.7).

Jesus' response is to ask, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these' (1.51). Nathanael has believed on the basis of the wonder of Jesus having seen him, but Jesus questions the basis of Nathanael's belief, and points out that more is required to see greater things. What might these greater things be? What more is required of a believer in order to see them? Jesus indicates something of the greater things, 'You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (1.51), a sight that looks back to the story of Jacob's dream (Genesis 28.12, 16-17). What more is required of belief is at the heart of the Cana to Cana section of the gospel (2.1—4.54).

Quotations

1

Jesus says to anyone who uses their faith or lack of faith to excuse their acts of disobedience to his call: First obey, do the external works, let go of what binds you, give up what is separating you from God's will! Do not say, I do not have the faith for that. You will not have it so long as you remain disobedient, so long as you will not take that first step. Do not say, I have faith, so I do not have to take the first step. You do not have faith, because and so long as you will not take that first step. Instead, you have hardened yourself in disbelief under the appearance of humble faith.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906–1945

2

Many Christians live their lives as though Jesus finished his work in the first century. They seem to think that being a Christian is simply accepting the finished work of Christ, going to church every Sunday to express their worship, and waiting for his second coming. No, no, no. Jesus is working today, just as he did 2,000 years ago, to accomplish his cosmic mission... Some people can grasp the idea that Jesus goes to work every day, just like we do. Or conversely, and more correctly, we go to work every day, just like Jesus does. He told his disciples, 'My