

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, rcl yr a, 2021
St. John's in the Provincial State of Emergency
1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

One of my most enduring memories of my Newfoundlander grandfather—my Pop, really—was him sitting in his chair by the window at my parent's house. He was a tough man who had spent many of his working years fishing off the Labrador coast, for whole seasons at a time. It was a rough life, and as my dad tells it—even if he had mellowed as he grew older, sitting by the window reading his Bible with his hearing aids turned off—he was a man who knew how to swear like the sailor he was.

He had the sort of body, even as an elderly man, that you could imagine hauling on ropes on a blustery sea. This was especially evident in his hands. His hands were *big*, and even his *fingers* were thick and muscular. My memory of him, though, was not as a swearing sailor, but as a man sitting in that chair by the window with his arms open, his huge hands palms out, saying, "come here."

And as a kid you weren't sure you wanted to get too close, his face was unshaven, and you knew he was going to kiss you, and say something like "yes, me little lover," or "yes my little trout." My mum worked at the university with international students, and I can remember a tiny Chinese student visiting us once, and he did the same to her. It was all a bit embarrassing.

But it was, in retrospect, a simple expression of welcoming love, even offered to a stranger: "*come here*, me little lover, me little trout." All finished with a big wet kiss on the cheek.

Philip, in our reading from John's gospel, makes another invitation. Philip had already received an invitation to follow Jesus, by Jesus himself, and had done so. And it seems the first thing Philip does, after following Jesus, is to find the most unbelieving of people, Nathanael.

In his excitement, Philip says to Nathanael, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." But Nathanael is unimpressed, and says as much: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Can anything good come from that backward place?"

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And I expect we can relate to this. I know for me, when it comes to speaking to others, maybe on the verge of inviting them to church, I imagine their response to be similar: any invitation to church would be met with a sneer, a smirk, and a snicker: “you want me to what? Go to church? I mean, I get that Jesus was something, but can anything good come from the church? From that backward and hypocritical place?”

But Philip's answer to Nathanael's sneer isn't to try and convince him that the church really is ok, is it; nor does Philip expound on the truth of doctrine and why Nathanael should believe it all; Philip doesn't give a sermon or earnestly preach, does he. It's all much simpler than that; because Philip doesn't seem to think he has to *convince* Nathanael of anything, he doesn't think he needs to change Nathanael's mind about who Jesus is, or about whether anything good really can come out of Nazareth.

Philip says, simply, “come and see.” “Come and see Jesus.”

I don't know about you, but I'm a bit relieved that Philip invites Nathanael, not to come and see a “what,” but to come and see a “who.” It's not to a building, or a reredos, as compelling and beautiful as they may be.

And it's a “who” that isn't at first an “us” either; Nathanael isn't invited to come and see Andrew, or Peter. Or Preston or the wardens or the altar guild or the ACW or the Parish Council or anyone on the inside or any of us on the margins. We are, after all, the failing faithful.

Sure, we read the Bible together, we pray together, we lead and administer, we feed the hungry, we support good causes, and we serve at the altar. And sometimes ... we gossip and we complain before we build one another up, we look out for ourselves first instead of our neighbour, and we criticize more quickly than we offer a word of thanks.

So perhaps we should be glad, and relieved, that Philip isn't inviting Nathanael to come and see *us*—the failing faithful followers of Jesus. Perhaps we should be glad that Nathanael is invited by Philip to come and see *Jesus*. Just as we, as we say to others, “come and see,” are inviting them to come and see Jesus.

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Because Jesus is already the one saying, not just to Nathanael, and not just to the stranger, but to us: "Let anyone who is thirsty *come to me*." (John 7:37) The Jesus who is already saying, "Let the little children *come to me*, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matthew 19:14) The Jesus who is already saying, "*Come to me*, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

So to say "come and see" is to invite another to come and see much more than us: it is an invitation to hear Jesus's voice in the Word; it is an invitation to partake in him in the sacrament.

But perhaps we aren't off the hook quite as much as we might hope to be. Because an invitation to come and see Jesus is also to come and see his body, the church—indeed us, Jesus's own failing faithful followers.

And this is why my thoughts went to my Newfoundlander grandfather as I prepared this sermon. He was certainly no saint, if we were to look closely at his whole life—no more than we are. He was a justified sinner, a man made right by God in Christ, and as such *could* embody Jesus's own gracious invitation to come and see, and to be embraced by the one who says, "come to me, my little lover, my little trout."

"Come and see" Jesus, indeed—in word, in sacrament, and even in us—his failing faithful followers, so graciously redeemed and entrusted to be his body, entrusted to love and embrace the world he is already drawing so closely to himself.

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