

2024-01-14

Who's Calling?

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

John 1:43-45

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Come and See

Last Sunday I remarked that I thought it was quite a leap for the magi to go from seeing a new star in the sky to the conclusion it was the sign of the newborn King of the Jews. Today's call story of Philip and Nathanael are equally curious.

Jesus says: *Philip, come follow me.*

Philip says: *hey Nathanael, I found the Messiah! THAT is a leap.*

Granted, Jesus must have had an electrifying personality, but "Yup, he's the one who was prophesied for centuries" seems a stretch.

Nathanael's answer to Philip was just as reactionary as Philip's pronouncement of Jesus' messiahship. "Bah! Nothing good can come out of Nazareth." That's really a hurtful thing to say. It's judgmental, disparaging and rude. *Ewwwww, Nazareth?* When you and I neglect to stop and think, we give way to reactions rather than responses. That's why reactions are associated with knee-jerks – knee jerk reactions – because we can't help but kick out when that nerve is hit. It's a reflex. Reflexes and reactions, like kicks and rude comments, can cause harm.

As a response, Nathanael might have said to Philip instead: *Huh. Nazareth? I wouldn't have thought about the Messiah coming from there.* It's honest, neutral, and at the same time, thoughtful of who might be listening, and what their context is.

On a side note, it's nice to recognize that the call to Jesus from God at his baptism, was paid forward as a call to Philip, who immediately paid it forward to Nathanael. We call each other to serve God based on the call each of us has received. As a community, we are responsible to each other. We are committed to the well-being of individuals and the well-being of the whole. Jesus started building these connections right away, and we are still building them!

One way we build stronger connections is by listening – listening to each other's excitement and hopes, and to pain and devastation. When we listen completely, we are less likely to react and more likely to respond to each other. Our responses are the building blocks of maintaining community.

Throughout the investigation over the last months, I have witnessed reactions and responses from many people. My reflection is that the reactions were often grounded in gaps of information. We react to what **might** be going on, **might** be said, or **might** not be heard. Thoughtful response becomes more difficult when there are pieces missing. The investigative process has included time and space for verbal and written statements from the complainants and their witnesses, as well as verbal and written statements from Glenn and his witnesses. Based on all that information, the Ministerial Council of the Mountain States has made a judgment that we will hear today. One reason the process has seemed so long is that they were striving for a response to the testimony on both sides, and not a reaction.

As I have shared with you before, I have been on the complainant side and the accused side of investigations. I can say wholeheartedly that despite best intentions, these are human policies and systems that are being interpreted and implemented by humans. I cannot in good conscience say that we HAVE to (or are required to) trust this or any process.

HOWEVER we are a community of faith. **We don't have to trust the human systems in order to trust that God can work through them.** We DO trust that God works through even the most flawed people and the most flawed structures. God worked through

the Christian-oppressor Saul to transform him into the apostle Paul who built the Church. God worked through the small, weak and sinful shepherd David in order that he would become a slayer of giants and King of nations. How could anything good come out of Nazareth? God even worked through Jesus, a man of humble birth and station, and through him God transformed everything.

I want to underline for you today that my expectation for this congregation is to receive the information at our congregational meeting with the knowledge that we are still in the midst of a process, not the end. We very much want this to be a time of resolution, but we are on a journey in which this meeting is a part. I **expect** that this congregation will listen to all the communications with prayerful consideration for the people in the pews around us who are hurting and grieving over this shared situation for different reasons than our own. I **expect** that this congregation's responses – whether anger, exaltation, relief or condemnation – will not erupt as reactions, so as to be damaging or hurtful to the whole of this body of Christ.

Something good did come out of Nazareth, because God was at work through humankind. Something good will come out of this human investigation process, no matter where the next steps lead us, because God is already working through it.

Come and See.

Amen.