

My guess is... that Jesus has just returned from his days in the desert. There he wrestled with his future and the different paths he might have chosen. In other places the gospels call this Jesus' temptations or his testing. And the path he's chosen is that he will follow his Father's will. His next course of action will focus on forming a core community. And here in today's passage we see this process beginning.

Jesus says to Phillip "follow me" and then Phillip says to Nathaniel "come and see." As this new community is forming, we have a gospel message that is about "seeing" – seeing Jesus in our midst. The text is about what the disciples see. And we, like them, are invited to ask ourselves what and how we are called to "see" in our time.ⁱ But lest the irony get lost on us, it seems that if this text makes anything at all clear, it is that when it comes to Jesus, nothing is as it first appears. Actually, at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus is a new way of seeing; in other words "to the followers of Jesus, the whole world looks different." Learning to see with eyes of faith, this is Jesus' call to us – seeing with eyes of faith rather than eyes of the world. Remember that famous line from *The Little Prince* – it says it well: "The eyes are blind. One must see with the heart." (*repeat*) Perhaps all aspects of faith have this conundrum of not being as straightforward as they might appear – like this "seeing" is not what it first appears to be. Also it's not as simple, as the notion: "seeing is believing". Rather, I would suggest, that believing gives us a new way of "seeing" - a way of realizing the gospel in the life of the world right now. And in our life – seeing with eyes of hope, seeing with the heart – will show us how God sees us.

There are clues in our text of this new way of seeing. The most obvious is pointing out that Jesus, the savior of the world, is from Nazareth which is Timbuktu, a no-where-land, podunk town, where no one of any account comes from. It's an easy lesson to see: don't judge a book by its cover, "don't judge a person on the basis of rumor, reputation, or family." It's a message that Jesus drives home throughout his ministry. Jesus is friend to the outcast and sinner, the marginalized. "Jesus sees the world in ways that no one else seems to see it, and he calls his disciples – then and now – to see the same way."

Here are some words that speak to me of this message: they come from "Martin Luther's powerful explanation of the eighth commandment in his Small Catechism. Luther writes, "we are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light."ⁱⁱ Given this passage, we might interpret Luther's words to mean – speak kindly of each other, see the best in one another, not the worst, and look for the true self, the best self – for they and we – are made in the image of God, look for this image!!

This commandment of Luther' is most difficult to practice. It is, in the words of our Baptismal Covenant, "to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself," and further "to respect the dignity of every human being." This is so difficult for us to consistently practice, this fundamental loving kindness, because it requires us to have a radical shift in our perspective, to adjust our vision, "seeing our enemies with eyes of love, and viewing our friends and neighbors through eyes of grace." I believe this is at the heart of what it means for us to live as Christian people, and it is the central to what we call Christian discipleship in the world. This is not the world's "I'll believe it when I see it" – no, our believing is what gives us a new way of seeing, a way of seeing the hope God has for us, and for the life of the world across the ages.

Let's look again at Jesus' beginning to form his new community of disciples. We read, Jesus found Philip and said to him, "follow me." And what comes next? It's easy to miss these words: *Philip found Nathanael*. Here in this moment Philip is witnessing to his relationship with Jesus by telling Nathanael

about it. He invites Nathanael to come meet Jesus himself. It's at the heart of our faith, isn't it: inviting others to join us: inviting others into relationship with Jesus, with the Christian faith, and with its community?ⁱⁱⁱ What strikes me about this brief interaction is how Philip talks to him in a way that will speak to his heart. They are friends. They trust one another. Maybe Philip was referring back to their earlier conversations about the mysterious figure that the prophets wrote about - in effect, maybe Philip was saying, "You know the one we've talked about? I think he is here! I have met him and I think you would like to too!"

Despite Nathaniel's grumpy response: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Phillip is not put off – he is full of enthusiasm and warmth. The genuine enthusiasm of a friend we like and trust – this has the greatest chance of drawing us in. It's like hearing from a friend about a 'book you just have to read...you'll love it...I know you will' or 'you simply must see such-and-such show.'" We don't ask tons of questions. We take the recommendation because it comes from someone we trust.

This is how we are called to speak – with enthusiasm and warmth – inviting others to meet this Jesus whom we know and are seeking. Like Phillip's witnessing to Nathaniel about who Jesus is, and what he means to him – we too invite others to experience God's healing love. The respected Biblical commentator Herbert O'Driscoll says, "The future of the Christian Church in our Western culture may depend on a return to this simple – but to many, daunting – ministry of Christians. We need to learn the art of inviting others to relationship with our Lord, with Christian faith, and with its community."^{iv}

We so often wonder – How do we grow the Christian Church? And here is an answer to ponder – we spread the gospel and grow the church through our inviting others to "come and see" ...through our warmth and enthusiasm...how we speak....how we see... . And this invitation is rooted in our believing – because it is through believing in Jesus Christ – that we can "see with the heart" and thereby see the hope that God has for us.

ⁱ Refer to and quotes by Kristen Johnston Largen in "Theological Themes" *Lectionary Homiletics*, Second Epiphany, Dec 2008-Jan 2009, page 58.

ⁱⁱ Martin Luther's Small Catechism, translated by Timothy Wengert, Augsburg Press, 1996, page 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ Herbert O'Driscoll, *The Word Today* (commentary), Year B, Vol 1.

^{iv} Herbert O'Driscoll, *The Word Today* (commentary), Year B, Vol 1, page 72.