

## January 22 - The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

We're in that Season after the Epiphany, reflecting on how the light of Christ shines in the world.

And what is the very first thing Christ, the Light of the World, does to get his mission going? Gather a group of ordinary people to be his followers.

You may wonder: If Jesus is the light of the world, why doesn't he just shine? Do something really dramatic, so people would see the light? Why does he begin by recruiting a bunch of ordinary, untrained, and sometimes not very bright people to work with him? Why doesn't Jesus just do all this good himself?

Whatever it is that Jesus Christ wants to do for the world, he chooses not to do it alone. He invites a group of everyday people like you and me to do it with him. Jesus refuses to save the world by himself.

Some of you think that you got out of bed on this cool January morning and came to church because you decided to -- you are such a good, committed Christian person that you chose to come worship. Well, an implication of today's Gospel is that it wasn't just your idea to come here; you were invited, summoned, called. Why you? Because that's the way Jesus does business.

All of us are Christians, not on the basis of something we decided but on the basis of an invitation that we received. Jesus doesn't work alone. Thus all the Gospels begin the story of Jesus' work by telling the story of Jesus calling disciples to work with him.

And yet, here's something odd in John's Gospel. After Andrew meets Jesus, the first thing Andrew does is to rush out, find his brother Simon Peter, and tell him about Jesus.

Maybe that's not so odd, because Andrew had met Jesus only after John the Baptist had pointed him out to him. Andrew was a follower of John and one day John pointed to Jesus and said that's one I've been talking about -- he's the Lamb of God.

After spending a few hours with Jesus, **Andrew**, leaves Jesus to get his brother Simon Peter, saying "*We have found the Messiah*" *Come and meet this Jesus*.

So John had told his co-worker Andrew about Jesus, and in turn Andrew tells his brother. The word about Jesus spreads from person to person -- is shared among co-workers, relatives and friends.

Jesus finds Philip and calls him, and Philip rushes out looking for his friend Nathaniel. Philip tells Nathaniel he has found the one whom Moses wrote about. Nathaniel snidely replies, "*Jesus of Nazareth? Can anything good come out of a hick town like Nazareth?*" Philip retorts, "*Come and see for yourself.*"

Did you notice that when Nathaniel expresses doubt about anything good coming out of Nazareth, Philip encourages Nathaniel to come and see Jesus in order to find out about Jesus for himself. Philip doesn't tell him everything he knows and believes, but only enough to make Nathaniel curious so he'll accept an invitation to come and see for himself.

Perhaps the lesson about the nature of discipleship unfolds from Philip's invitation to Nathaniel to "Come and see" - echoing Jesus' own invitation - which suggests a dynamic of approaching Jesus wherein disciples come and see, then see and know, then know and tell others. Here, telling others about Jesus not only sets the stage for discipleship. It is the substance of what it means to be a disciple. Disciples tell others about the Master.

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In John's Gospel we get this account of some of Jesus' disciples being called by other disciples. Which leads me to an insight: sometimes Jesus directly calls people to follow him; sometimes people call people to follow Jesus.

In our first lesson we heard a bit of Samuel's story. The Lord calls Samuel – speaks to him directly – and Samuel doesn't realize that it is the Lord who is calling him. He assumes it must be Eli calling from the next room. After the second time Samuel hears a voice calling him in the night, Eli tells him it must be the Lord. So the third time Samuel responds to the Lord's call "*Here I am Lord. Your servant listens.*"

Maybe some of you are like Samuel - You're here because, at some point, the Lord appeared directly to you and personally called you. Rejoice! In my experience, not many become followers of Jesus that way.

None of the first disciples received a direct word from the Lord - no dramatic supernatural event. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to two disciples who responded to Jesus invitation, "Come and see". One of them, Andrew, went to his brother and invited him. Another, Philip went to a friend, Nathaniel. *One person telling another person - God working in and through individuals to carry on his mission.*

I expect that most of you are here this morning because another disciple like Philip, like Andrew, called you to follow Jesus. Someone got you curious about Jesus or the church, and then invited you to come and see for yourself. Somebody told you the story, or lived the story of Jesus before you in such a way that eventually led you to say, "Yes, I want to know more about Christ and his church." Jesus not only chooses to work through people, but Jesus also works through people to call other people.

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The disciples were only beginning to comprehend the significance of this Jesus whom they will ultimately follow. Philip identifies Jesus as *the "son of Joseph from Nazareth"*. Nathaniel addressed Jesus as *"Rabbi - teacher"*. The disciples are not yet able to recognize who Jesus really is.

So like them, you don't have to know everything about Jesus – or completely understand – in order to talk to others – and invite them to "Come and see" for themselves. And if you would talk to others about Christ and His church, you'll find your own understanding and faith increased.

You need to talk to others about it because a secret faith is a shallow faith. Maybe it's *not really your* faith until you tell someone else about it. And putting your faith into your own words in conversation both clarifies your beliefs and strengthens them. That's how it worked for Andrew and Philip and the others - and it will work for you too.

*Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord and  
if anybody asks why you believe as you do,  
be ready to tell him in a gentle and respectful way."*

1 Peter 3:15 Living Bible

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Those who are outside the church are missing something. *What we can do* is to invite them to come and worship and enjoy fellowship with other Christians. We invite *and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.*

So make a list of those you might invite.

Think about your immediate family – and your relatives. *Are all of them active in a church?* Remember, when Jesus had spoken to only two people, one of them, Andrew, went to talk to his brother, Peter. In a couple of weeks, Peter brings Jesus to meet his mother-in-law.

The Jesus movement began to spread as *the first followers invited their relatives.*

What about your friends and neighbors?

*Do they all go to church?* When the Jesus movement consisted of only four followers, one of them, Philip, a neighbor of Andrew and Peter, went to his friend Nathaniel, to invite him to meet Jesus. *Nathaniel* was skeptical. But Philip simply told him to come and see for himself.

What about *the people you work with or go to school with.* By the time the Jesus movement had grown to twelve, four of them – one third – were fishermen from the same little town.

The movement included family members and relatives, *friends and neighbors*, and also people who knew each other from work.

There are people you know to *who are potential guests in the Lord's house.* Remember, you are Not trying to convert them. You are just inviting them to come and see for themselves

Maybe it's *someone you invited before* and they weren't interested. It just wasn't the right time for them then, *but that doesn't mean that you should stop trying.* Invite them again.

Remember that even when the Lord himself calls someone, like Samuel, they may not respond immediately. It took the Lord three times to get through to young Samuel – so it may take you longer.

Try writing the names of those you could invite on a sheet of paper, and then each day ask the Lord to guide you.

*Which ones might you invite?*

*How should you approach them?*

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To make it easier, we've scheduled a Chili Bowl Lunch on February 5 and then Rodeo Sunday on the 19th. It will be a great service with some special music. We'll even print some invitations for you to give to your friends and relatives, neighbors and co-workers.

Commit yourself to bringing one person with you to church in February. Remember, this is how the church – the followers of Jesus – has always grown.

The call from the Lord comes through the voices of other Christians, saying *Come and see for yourself.*