Epiphany 2

January 17, 2021

John 1:43-51

 During the weeks between Christmas and Lent, we hear passages that point us to Jesus’ identity. These stories put the Christmas and Easter stories into perspective — it’s only when we know who Jesus is that we understand why Christmas and Easter matter.

 Among these are the stories of the calling of the disciples. Today, we hear of the calling of both Philip and Nathanael.

 Jesus tells Philip, “Follow me.” And Philip does. But it didn’t stop for him there; he has to share the news with someone else.

 He found his friend Nathanael and told him that he had found the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote.

 Nathanael’s response is one of hesitance. Still, he’s curious enough to follow when Philip says, “come and see.”

 As Nathanael walks in Jesus’ direction, Jesus greets him: “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

Puzzled, understandably so, Nathanael wants to know how Jesus knows anything about him. To which Jesus says, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

In that moment, Nathanael somehow just *knows* that Jesus is the Son of God.

 Nathanael had an epiphany, that moment when the proverbial light bulb turns on and we come to a new understanding.

We can have epiphanies about all kinds of things. They can come after we’ve struggled to understand something, like a math concept, and we immediately grasp how to solve a problem and can move on to more challenging concepts.

Epiphanies aren’t the end of the journey, but the beginning, equipping us to take on new challenges, to go deeper than ever before.

Rarely do our epiphanies come without any outside influence. Nathanael only had his because Philip encouraged him to “come and see.”

Epiphanies in our faith journey show us more clearly who God is. We don’t get the full picture, because we can’t fully know God. But we get a tiny bit more of the picture brought into focus. And as we grow in our understanding of God, we grow in our understanding of what it means to be a disciple.

We have one other call story in our texts for today, the call of Samuel.

We’re told that, despite all the time he spent serving Eli and the temple, Samuel didn’t yet know the Lord. Still, when Eli tells him that it is the Lord calling to him, Samuel is ready to be obedient, to respond, “Here I am, Lord. Speak, for your servant is listening.”

And for that willingness to serve, Samuel gets the job of prophet. His first task is essentially to fire Eli and his sons, and to tell Eli that his family will be punished for their sins.

Samuel’s openness to hearing from God and his obedience of that call led him on a path of service to the Lord.

For Samuel, Philip, and Nathanael, hearing God speak to them led them on a path that was not always easy.

For Philip, Nathanael, and the others who left their families and work behind, it meant travel into Samaria, a place Jews typically avoided, so that Jesus could find more followers. It meant learning from Jesus what it meant to love their neighbors, even expanding their idea of who their neighbor was.

And it meant following Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, as he made his way to the cross.

Their willingness to follow Jesus allowed them to grow in their understanding of God, to learn to see creation the way God sees it.

And it allowed them to participate in the ministry of Jesus.

At first, following Jesus first meant literally following him as he walked from place to place. But it eventually came to mean picking up the work that Jesus was doing, continuing Jesus’ ministry, after Jesus’ ascension.

Now, we are called into that work.

We believe in what we call the ministry of all believers. Each of us has a vocation, a calling from God. We’re given the tools we need to do that work by the Holy Spirit, who equips us and guides us along the way.

But we’re not called to do that work alone. Indeed, we *cannot* do our work alone. None of us has all the gifts or ability needed to do everything.

Jesus sent the disciples out 2 by 2, because being a disciple is not always easy work. At times, it may be full of joy and it may make us feel like our cup is overflowing, but it is often challenging work. When we work together, pooling our resources – our time, our talents, and our treasures – we can do infinitely more than we can on our own.

But there’s more to it than that. We need to surround ourselves with people who encourage us to hear God speaking to us, who help us interpret what God says, people who remind us of the good news of the Gospel. Because it’s easy to doubt that God is speaking to us, it’s easy to doubt God is calling us, and it’s easy to get so caught up in our own lives that we forget to listen to God at all.

Sometimes, we need to be like Eli and identify that God is calling someone, encouraging them to trust what they are hearing.

Sometimes, we need to be like Samuel and deliver a message that calls others to account for the ways they have strayed from faithful obedience of God.

Sometimes, we need to be like Philip and offer the invitation to “come and see.”

Always, we need to be ready to respond, “Here I am, Lord, for you called me. Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Let us pray: Almighty God, draw our hearts to you, guide our minds, fill our imaginations, that we may hear you call us and be ready to respond. Send your Spirit among us to equip us and guide us, that we may grow in faith and serve you without hesitation. Amen.