

John 1:43-51. "Jesus Calling" Second Sunday After Epiphany

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There is a hymn in the Lutheran Book of Worship that begins "Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult of life's wild, restless sea, Day by day his clear voice sounding, saying, "Christian, follow me."

One of the priests in our Deanery recently shared that he had found a daily devotional that was providing him comfort and guidance in this time of worldwide pandemic. It's called, "Jesus Calling," by Sarah Young. When my husband Jim asked what I would like for Christmas, I told him, I would like that devotional." Our daughter picked it up recently, read a page and said, "I want this book!"

Many times during this past year of worldwide suffering and loss; I have had occasion to reflect, " Never before in the history of our world have we had more need for Jesus!" Have you had similar thoughts?

Our text from The Gospel of John provides us a window into the past when someone else was convinced that the world needed Jesus. It was Philip, whom we remember from Luke's account of his encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts. Philip, prompted by an Angel of the Lord, went south on a desert road down from Jerusalem to Gaza where he encountered the Ethiopian Eunuch. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 3:7-8 which foretold the appearance of the Messiah. He did not know how to comprehend it. He asked Philip, "Tell me, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else." "It was then that Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." Philip was an evangelist! He not only led someone to Jesus--he baptized him!

It is this same Philip, who, being told by Jesus to follow him into Galilee. 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, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" But that did not stop Philip. He only said, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, " Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

Astonished, Nathanael responds, "Where did you get to know me?" And Jesus said, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Jesus SAW him--saw into his heart and his spirit! THEN Nathanael recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The Holy Spirit was active and worked faith in his heart. Philip answered Jesus' call to follow him, and realized his own "calling" to bring others to Jesus.

It was 1994 , I was in a meeting with my Bishop; when I was surprised to hear myself asking if there were any openings in a Mission Church. I had not planned to say that! "Yes!" he said. clearly surprised himself, as one had just been planned. A few short months later, installed as a Pastor Developer in Waukesha, WI., I had my own experience of the Holy Spirit.

I found myself sitting in my Prayer Chair longer than usual one morning. I always began my day there, asking for guidance before I began knocking on doors seeking people without a church home. I had been following a city grid of new homes of prospective members to visit. A voice prompted me, "Why don't you go today where someone has need of you?" Aware that I surely did not know where that was; I prayed for guidance and then got up, trusting I would be led to where I was needed.

First I drove around wondering how I would arrive at the right spot. I soon discovered that a small voice was prompting me to turn at times right or left. Finally, I found myself on a country road on which there were only three homes. I pulled up and headed for the first home. My knees were trembling as I knocked on that door--in both awe and fear. A huge sigh escaped me. No one was home.

Obedient but terrified, I went to the next house. I knocked. A young woman answered. Even through the screen door I could see that her eyes were red and full of tears and wet tear stains marked the front of her lavender blouse, revealing that she had been crying for some time.

I told her who I was and that I was seeking people who had no church home. She asked, "What kind of church?" "Lutheran." Her face melted and she asked, "Won't you come in?"

I learned that her best friend's husband had died after a long battle with cancer. She had just then returned from his funeral. "I feel so helpless now, she lives next door"...(the third house on her street)..."when he was alive, I went to see them, brought them food...now I feel so helpless."

At the end of our visit, she said, "Would you excuse me for a minute?" She returned with a tiny baby over her shoulder. Swinging around so I could see the baby, she said, "This is Elizabeth, would you baptize her?"

Months later, when we began worship, her family was seated in the front row and Elizabeth was our first baptism.

The hymn continues, "In our joys and in our sorrows, Days of toil and hours of ease, Still he calls, in cares and pleasures, Christian love me more than these."

When you are feeling helpless, weighed down by sadness and divisions in this world, know that if you sit regularly in solitude and prayer asking, "Jesus, who are you calling me to be and what would you have me do?" It will become clear to you.

My fervent prayer for each of you and for people of faith throughout our world is best summed up in the closing verse: " Jesus calls us! In your mercy, Savior, make us hear your call, Give our hearts to your obedience, Serve and love you best of all."

Amen. May it be so.