

John 1: 29-51

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

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.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Galatians 2:15-21

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for

me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Our Gospel story today tells the story of Jesus calling his first disciples. Did you notice that two of them were originally disciples of John the Baptist? These disciples had been following John around, because he was telling everyone to get ready for the Messiah to come. “Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord.” Then, when Jesus came around, they left John in their dust to follow Jesus, because he was the Messiah.

The disciples’ relationships with John, and then with Jesus, are very personal. The word disciple is sometimes translated, “student,” but a disciple is far more than a student. The disciples of an itinerant rabbi, like John, or like Jesus, literally leave everything behind and travel with him wherever he chooses to go.

There is no curriculum, no predefined course of study. They listen to every word that he says, not just directly about God or religion, but about everything. They memorize it all, and they try to distill wisdom from all of it. They fight for the coveted spot sitting on the floor at their master’s feet when he talks, because that’s the best spot for hearing every word. They are somewhere between devoted graduate students and a rock star’s groupies.¹ They do not just want to learn some academic material from their master, they want to learn everything that they can, and to personally become as much like their master as they can.

That is what a disciple is.

So, when Andrew and his fellow disciples even consider switching from being disciples of John to being disciples of Jesus, this is a big deal.

¹ There is, in fact, sometimes a fine line between the two, but that is part of the point: these men walk that line.

Jesus asks these men what they are looking for. This is an important question.

What are you looking for?

If you are looking for something you can point to and say that you are a religious person without any actual, you know, investment of yourself in it, ...

If you are looking for a rationale for why any behavior you like is acceptable, and anyone who disagrees is the problem, ...

If you are looking for a savior who gives you what you want but lets you live your life any way you want to, who does not demand that you change your selfish lifestyle in any way, then you can find people talking about a savior like that.

Turn on almost any religious broadcasting television or radio station, and you will hear people talking about a so-called savior who gives forgiveness without repentance, without you planning not to do again what you did that was wrong. He gives communion without confession, full acceptance back into the fold without your even admitting that you've done anything wrong. This so-called savior gives baptism without church discipline, acceptance without any standards for your future behavior.

It's not actually clear what their so-called savior saves them from. These media personalities avoid even using the word, "sin," except to describe what those other people over there are doing, those people that the media personalities want to say are bad people. This so-called savior claims to give Divine grace without discipleship, without your changing your life.

These broadcast personalities will tell you to “name it and claim it,” and they will tell you that you can make a deal with God on your terms, where God gives you everything you want and you don’t really have to do much in return. The cheap grace they offer is grace without the cross, without any suffering.²

Unfortunately, this so-called savior they are talking about is not Jesus Christ. They may use that name for their “fake god in a box,” but that is a case of mistaken identity. Every covenant made between God and God’s people at any time in history was made on God’s terms. God made everything, including us, and God gets to set the terms of agreements with us.

These media personalities have no answer to human suffering, no answer to death or grieving. That is because their so-called savior is not Jesus Christ, and he has no power to save anyone. Their so-called savior is an idol of their own invention, whom they have blasphemously called Jesus Christ. You don’t hear the word blasphemy from me very often. It is strong language, and I try to use it only when it is truly appropriate. Blasphemy means to slander God.

Jesus is not looking for fans.

Jesus is not looking for limited business partners, who make a transactional deal with him, this specific quid for that specific quo.

Jesus is looking for disciples.

If, on the other hand, you understand that a state called sin separates the world from being what God created it to be, ...

² List paraphrased from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*.

If you recognize that sin prevents you personally from completely being the amazing person whom you were created to be, and that you don't have the power to entirely eliminate that on your own, ...

If you are looking for a relationship with the Almighty God who created you and who can save you from sin, then something might be possible here.

If you are looking for a genuine relationship with the Almighty God, the God who created you and loves you enough to come down here, be born, live, and die for you, then Jesus says, "Come and see." Come and see what is involved. Jesus invites you into relationship.

This relationship is not an anonymous relationship. Jesus knows these would-be disciples, and he calls them by name. He looks at Simon, and says, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas." Cephas is usually translated Peter, but it literally means "Rock." Jesus already knows Simon's personality and the gifts that will develop, that Simon himself doesn't even know about yet. Jesus knows who Nathaniel is, and can tell him about seeing him the previous day. He knows who these people are before they come to him. Jesus knows who you are right now.

Jesus knows who you are. Jesus knows who you are better than you know who you are. Jesus knows who you are, deep down, far behind the *persona*³ that you show the world. Jesus knows the astounding, beautiful person whom you were created to be, and Jesus can clearly see the gap between those two people. And Jesus still says, "Come and see."

³ The word *persona* literally means an actor's mask, hiding what is beneath it.

This relationship is not expectation-free. Jesus has expectations of us, that we will love God with everything that we have and everything that we are, and that we will love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. All our neighbors. Even those who don't like us. And Jesus expects to be able to see that love not just in our words, but in our actions, plain and simple.

Jesus does not expect us to be perfect. Jesus knows that we are not perfect, and Jesus reaches out in love to us, anyway. That's how love works. You don't love someone because X. You love them despite things.

It is not about deserving it. Jesus knows that we don't. And that's okay. Keep trying to love God and love your neighbors. All your neighbors.

This relationship is not a relationship with limits on it. The Word of God, Jesus the Christ, came down here, was born, lived, and died for us. Jesus is all in.

We don't get to say, "Jesus, you can affect this part of my life, but not that part."

We don't get to say, "All that church stuff is good on Sunday, but Monday morning is just business." Either you are in relationship with Jesus Christ all the time, or not. He doesn't do "part-time lovers."

We don't get to say, "My relationship with my spouse doesn't involve Jesus." If you are truly in a relationship with Jesus Christ, then it will become the context for every relationship in your life: with your spouse, with your parents, with your kids, with your friends, with your co-workers, with the panhandler you see on the street.

If you are truly in a relationship with Jesus Christ, then you will find yourself treating the people in your life with love. Not just when you want something, but all the time. You will find

violence of any sort against those whom you love to be unthinkable. You will find people treating people whom you care about as *less than* themselves to be wrong, and you will find that yes, it does involve you.

This relationship that Jesus invites his followers into is full-time, and all-encompassing. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who walks with us always, through our suffering, through the very valley of the shadow of death.⁴ Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep.

This winter and spring, all the way through Easter, we will be reading from the gospel of John, looking at who Jesus is, in what he says and does.

Jesus Christ is calling.

Jesus says, “Come and see.”

Come and see what it is not to be a fan, but to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

⁴ Psalm 23.