

Text: John 1:43-51
Theme: "But How Do We Know?"
#940

Jim Gronbeck
Epiphany 2B
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When our kids were looking at colleges to apply to after high school it seemed like a daunting task. There were so many out there, so many options for majors, scholarships, and places to live that I wondered how in the world these kids would ever be able to decide where to go next! Like any self-respecting Lutheran pastor I tried to get them to go to Concordia in Moorhead! But I struck out. Three children, and none of them went to good ol' Concordia.

Matt was interested in engineering and NDSU, not Concordia, had an engineering dept.—and a very highly respected one! Andrea was interested in elementary education. Bingo! But she didn't want to go to the F-M area because that's where EVERYONE from Battle Lake went!! She ended up at Southwest State U in Marshall, got a great education, and met her husband to be! Kristen, interested in Physical Therapy, went to St. Scholastica because they had a good PT program there. And of course, she met her future husband there as well!

It seems that these big decisions on their futures sort of fell into place. Fortunately I did not have to decide for them. When the time came,

they just knew what was right for them. And, of course, God was doing the leading and showing them the way He had planned for them.

We face many decisions in life; not all are as impactful as choosing a career or a university to attend. Still, however, we have to ask ourselves how it is that we arrive at our decisions. Are our decisions based on impulse? Are they made according to what is trending in society or what our friends are doing? Do we factor our faith into our decisions—asking ourselves “What would Jesus want me to do, or what does the Bible say in relation to my decision?” Do we do what we feel is right even if it may not be the popular choice? Most likely we move between all of these ideas depending on what the decision is—some are bigger than others and require more thought or less thought. St. Paul addresses some major decisions in our Second Lesson and reminds us that the big decisions should be made with our faith in mind, and not simply by what ‘everyone else is doing.’

When we are, or have been, faced with a career move, or retirement, or marriage, or what school to attend, or even when we are faced with health questions requiring important decisions, how do we decide what is the right choice?

Think about Philip and Nathanael in the Gospel today. They were just going about their everyday lives, probably not doing anything special, when they were confronted by a stranger named Jesus. Jesus walked up to Philip and said, "Follow me." What was it that possessed Philip to drop everything, alter his life plans, and follow this complete stranger? John doesn't record any details, he leaves us to believe that Philip simply followed Jesus.

Put yourselves in Philip's shoes. What would YOU do? I can imagine a few different responses: "So you say your name is Jesus...let me see if I can find you on Facebook, or Google." "Do you have a website for your group? Give me a little time to check you out further."

But there must have been something compelling about Jesus. Jesus obviously knew what He was doing in calling these persons as followers. Philip followed unquestioningly, and then went to tell Nathanael. He found Nathanael under a fig tree and said, "We have found Him about whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth."

It is important to note two symbols John has made use of here. First, Philip spoke about Moses, the Law, and the prophets. This reflected his knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. Second, an Israelite sitting under a

fig tree symbolized someone who studied the Scriptures and was awaiting the Messiah.

Nathanael seemed naturally skeptical. He asked if anything good could come from Nazareth! It may seem sarcastic to us, like our jokes about Iowa, but to one who studied the Scriptures it was a valid question. The Messiah was to come from Bethlehem; no mention was made of Nazareth.

Philip, however, didn't attempt to argue. He simply said, "Come and see." Make your own decision, Nathanael. This leads us to ask how we are able to discern Jesus' will or call to us. How are we able to know for sure what God wants for us? How can we tell if/when Jesus is speaking to us and calling us to some specific purpose or decision?

When you say to someone, "Come and see (for yourself)," you usually have something visually interesting to show them. But Philip, it appeared, just had an ordinary man to show Nathanael. When Nathanael laid eyes on Jesus, however, he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. Nathanael's 'seeing' wasn't with his eyes, it was with his heart. Jesus knew that here was an Israelite who was eagerly awaiting the Messiah. Nathanael was able to discern that here was the one for whom the

Israelites were waiting. He saw beyond the ordinary man before him to find the Son of God, the King of Israel. Nathanael was ready.

Israel's big problem with Jesus was discernment. They had been waiting for so long for the Messiah. In fact, for many, their religion had become a religion of **waiting** instead of **looking**. Therefore, many couldn't discern or see for themselves who the Messiah was when He did come!

We too, have a problem with discernment. We can often miss the times when Jesus comes to us and calls us to follow Him. Oh, we may believe in Jesus, we may come to worship Him, but do we let Jesus get close to us? Do we let Him get into our hearts and do business with the way we live our lives? When Jesus starts overturning some of our applecarts, do we quickly usher Him out the door? When we don't agree with Him, do we turn a deaf ear? When you find something pricking your conscience, when something you said is bothering you, it could be Jesus at work. When you feel as if something you did, or are contemplating is wrong, what do you do? Listen to that voice within you. It's telling you something. Our question, "But how do we know, or how can we be sure what is the right decision," is best answered by Philip's response, "Come and see." Come and worship the King. Search the Scriptures for the answers to your questions and problems. Spend time in prayer sharing

your life and your feelings with the LORD. Listen for the still, small voice which will speak to you in a myriad of ways. Take the chance, open your heart, and know firsthand the grace of our LORD. He does not condemn, nor does he hold our sins against us. He forgives and love, and leads us beyond our wildest expectations.

Jesus has called us, and we have, for the most part, followed. Jesus called us in our baptism and has promised to lead us every step of our lives. He calls us to share our lives with Him and to share ourselves with others. He calls us to leave our sin and guilt with Him and find the forgiveness and love that only He can give. He calls us to go out into the world following Him as Philip and Nathanael responded to Jesus when HE called them. Be open. Be responsive. Be ready, for you will not be disappointed or left alone.

AMEN