

# Sermon: Epiphany 2

Mr. Evans DeVries

January 14, 2018

Year B

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

Stephen Hultgren, Lecturer in New Testament at Australian Lutheran College writes that the gospel reading for the second Sunday after the Epiphany is always taken from John: 1:29-42 (Year A); 1:43-51 (Year B); and 2:1-11 (Year C). Obviously, all three have to do with the revelation of Jesus to the world. In Year A, John the Baptist came in order that Jesus "might be revealed to Israel" (1:31). In Year C, Jesus' miracle at Cana "revealed his glory" and consequently, "his disciples believed in him" (2:11). As for our present text in Year B, we get a hint of the glory of Jesus, later to be revealed in the resurrection when Nathanael is told he will "see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (1:51). The call of Philip's brother Nathanael is one of the two aspects of this reading upon which I want to focus. What stands out as unusual to me are the two references to the Old Testament figure, Jacob. When Nathanael is brought to Jesus, his greeting is "Here is a true Israelite, a man in whom there is no guile."

Scott Hoezee writes that there aren't too many biblical figures who are accused of guile. Probably the most guile-full is Jacob. Hoezee says, "Jacob, as you may recall, always got ahead in life by his own wits. He relied on his own cunning and craftiness to snag life's goodies. He outsmarted dim-witted Esau, did an end run on his nearly blind father, Isaac, and then spent the better part of twenty years finding ever more creative ways to snooker his Uncle Laban out of just about everything he owned." In response to Jesus' greeting, Nathanael asks how Jesus knows so much about him and is surprised to hear the fig tree answer. At this point, Jesus tells Nathanael that, just as in Jacob's dream, he, too, will see the Angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Jesus is the ladder that connects heaven and earth. I find it interesting that we don't see Nathanael again until the last chapter of John's gospel when he is present in the boat

and on the shore the third time the risen Jesus appears to the disciples. Jesus' "promise" of seeing greater things was fulfilled. The commentaries that I read do not agree on why the link to Jacob was used. Some call it enigmatic, others feel it strengthens the idea of Jesus' divine nature as the connector of heaven and earth. I would like to move to the other point i want to mention, but need to reference the passage that immediately precedes today's text, John 1:29-42.

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 Sprit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Sprit.' And I myself have seen and testified that this is the son of God." The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as Jesus walked 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).

Several commentators find those three words used first by Jesus in the previous section and then repeated by Philip, come and see, to be highly significant. When John says, in the preceding reading, "Look, here is the Lamb of God." the two disciples of John follow Jesus. When He notices, He asks what they are looking for and they reply, "Where are you staying" and Jesus says, "Come and see." In today's reading, when Philip tells Nathanael "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." Stephen Hultgren writes that "after witnessing Jesus' powers of perception, Nathanael believes Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel. Jesus tells him that he will see greater things than these (his powers of perception). This exchange points to the ambiguous relationship between faith and sight in John's gospel. On the one hand, John recognizes the usefulness of signs for faith (e.g., 2:11; 20-31). Nathanael is promised greater signs which will lead to deeper faith, certainly a desirable outcome. Yet on the other hand, John seems to regard faith without signs as superior to faith with signs (20:31).

Many of the commentators I read see those three words as the way our faith is grown and spread. Karoline Lewis summed the growth part up best for me when she wrote:

We come to expect that Epiphany is about the revelation of Jesus. About finding Jesus, witnessing Jesus in various epiphanic moments. It's not supposed to be about being found ourselves. John's gospel invites us to imagine that these can be one and the same. That is finding Jesus in those revelatory moments... is also when you find yourself. When you realize your identity as a follower, a disciple, and get a glimpse, perhaps a new glimpse -- and here is the epiphany -- of something you have not seen before when it comes to your own faith story, your own discipleship, your own concept of what it means to believe.

David Lose says, "Come and see. Such simple, open and inviting words. I think, that sum up not only the heart of the Gospel of John but the whole Christian life. For this is the only fit response to having witnessed the grace and mercy of God take shape among us, enfleshed in the babe of Bethlehem, crucified at Golgotha, raised on the third day...all for our sake. These are the words we're invited to say to others who are seeking something more from life."

Evans