

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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January 15, 2006
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
John 1:43-51
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 3:1-10
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 67
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
Gospel: John 1:43-51

Build Forever Friendships

What makes a person a good friend, a trusted friend, a dear friend, someone you would consider one of your closest friends? What is it that makes that? Somewhere along the line, for someone to be your closest, dearest friend, they are going to have to put up with your stupidity, aren't they? You are going to have done and said something foolish and they are going to have to endure it, point it out to you, and put up with your backlash maybe at times against things that they say to you. You are going to have to endure some of those kinds of things. They will take your flack, and they will still keep coming back, because they are your friend. That is the nature of friendship.

Sometimes what cements those bonds of friendship might surprise us. Sometimes it isn't some big, elaborate, grand gesture, but it is just simple things. Simple messages spoken in love that are clearly seen that makes that person a dear friend to you.

I have experienced that in my life. It came as a surprise completely out of the blue because I had a good friend that was going through difficult times and we had talked quite a bit. I was thinking one day about how I had really been failing this friend, not doing all that I could as his friend and his pastor. All of a sudden there was a knock at the back door, and I went and answered it. It was one of this man's friends. They came in and we sat down and we talked for quite awhile. And they were there to thank me for being such a good friend and helping him through this difficult time. Here I was thinking I hadn't done enough, but this person came and really taught me that just speaking simple messages in love is what leads to deep and abiding friendships. I think there is great truth in that.

Speaking simple truths in love to a friend is exactly what we see in our text this morning. In John 1 we see Philip putting up with Nathanael doubting his claims about a Savior from Nazareth, even mocking it. He puts up with that flack. Simply in love he says, "Come and see". A simple message spoken in love, and the Lord used that simple message spoken in love to build a forever friendship.

You and I have the opportunity as people who know Jesus—that he lived perfectly in our place and died in our place, and the Spirit has led us to believe that our sins have been washed away in the conquering lamb that is portrayed in the arch above our chancel, that that conquering lamb has given us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Since you and I know this, God lays in front of us opportunities to build forever friendships. We do it with that simple message of love, and we do it with patience and understanding.

If you take out your Bible this afternoon and read John 1, you are going to find this happen and then you are going to find the next day, the next day, and the next day listed three times in Chapter 1—just like our text started out with. It says, “*The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.*” That is actually the fourth day that is mentioned in John 1. On the first day, John the Baptist had said, “I am not the Messiah. I am not the one that is worthy to untie the sandals of the one that is actually coming. I am just the guy that is pointing him out.”

On the second day, he pointed him out. He said to some of his disciples who had been following him, “Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. In much of the apocryphal writing of the day, lamb was portrayed just like that lamb above our chancel area—with a conquering flag of victory—as one who would be the conquering victorious lamb. That almost had become more prominent in their thinking than the Passover Lamb whose blood was shed, and through that blood, people were delivered. Both pictures are actually in Scripture. But the conquering lamb had become a little more prevalent at the time of John the Baptist. So when he says, “Look, the lamb of God”, they weren’t necessarily thinking about sacrifice like you and I hear when we hear John the Baptist say, “Look, the lamb of God.” The lamb who shed this blood, and by the lamb’s blood, we are made clean. Our sins are forgiven is what we hear.

Then came day three. Again, John is with some of his disciples, and there along the Jordan, Jesus is coming along, and John stares intently at him and again says, “Look, the lamb of God”. He says it to John and Andrew. Then Andrew goes and finds Peter and tells him, “We found the Messiah. We have found the one”. They spent the day with him. In that setting, it says, “*The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.*” He was going to go back up north. Finding Philip, Jesus says to him, “*Follow me.*” Follow him in the sense of being a disciple of his and learn from him—not just play follow the leader like kids on a playground, but follow in the sense to be a disciple of his.

We are told that Philip, like Andrew and Peter who had just met Jesus the day before, were from the same home town. He went and he found another guy from their home town, Nathanael, and said, “*We have found the one*”. The “We”—“**We have found the one**” leads you to understand that Andrew and Peter, after they had met with Jesus, shared who this Jesus was with Philip. So Philip knew everything and probably heard some of the things that John the Baptist had said, and he had some exposure to this Jesus and the claims that John the Baptist were making. When he says, “*We have found*”, you get the idea that they had talked about this and discussed this at length. The Spirit had led Philip to the conclusion that this is the fulfillment of prophecy—this is the Messiah. So he gets all excited after Jesus had said, “*Follow me*”, and later on he goes and he finds his friend, Nathanael—can you imagine how excited he is with this kind of good news? For thousands of years they had been pointing ahead to the Messiah, and he just talked with him. You could almost imagine that this guy couldn’t get the words out. He was probably talking so fast, so excited, so thrilled, and what is he met with? He is met with a cold bucket of water tossed all over him, isn’t he? “*Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?*” Nazareth wasn’t mentioned in all the prophecies that the Messiah would be born there. Nathanael takes his friend’s excitement and tries to tell him to quit acting so goofy and shut up.

It is a good thing that we are never that way, right? It is a good thing we never see someone excited and react negatively. That is not within us at all, is it? Do you ever find yourself doing that? Our sinful nature can react so negatively to so many different things and negativism seems to breed negativity. Grumbling leads to grumbling as we studied in our study of the Korah's rebellion this morning in Bible study. It is amazing, isn't it, that God can work in us and through us when you can see our sinful nature at work so often in how we tend to react in those kinds of ways. I would have to think that the vast majority of us here can think back to a time that we have reacted negatively, when we've grumbled or when we have complained about things when someone else was all excited about what they were doing. Maybe intentionally, maybe unintentionally, but we have thrown that bucket of water on other people at some time or in some way.

Sometimes it has to do with God. Sometimes it has to do even with the love that Jesus has for us. Sometimes maybe someone is so excited about the Bible study that they have gone to, they come and invite us to go to a Bible study and our reaction is that we are too busy and we don't get anything out of that and you can make the Bible say what you want—we can just fill bucket after bucket of cold water to throw on that person's excitement. We are sinners.

The amazing thing about God's love for us is that he loves us more than our sinful nature sins. He loves us more than we are able to react negatively to anything. He loves us perfectly. He loves us intensely. He loves us completely. So much so that Jesus was perfect in our place. He left heaven, perfectly went through life without uttering a negative word that offended someone else. He uttered negative words, but only when it was to God's glory to point out sin so that others could repent. But he went through life entirely never doing the things that come so naturally to me and to you. He did it because they come naturally to me and you. He did it because God demands perfection of us. Since we can't do it, Jesus did it for us.

So when he says to us, "Follow me", he is really saying to us, "Trust me that I have taken away all your sins. Trust me that your sins are completely removed forever and now live to my glory—not to get to heaven, but to thank me that I was perfect in your place. That I carried every last one of your sins and they were nailed with me to the cross. And only I came down from the cross, not your sins. Your sins are no longer clinging to you or to me. They have been forgiven."

It's amazing that our God says that to us, but that is what he wants to say to us day after day after day. Our God loves us. He wants us to know it and he wants us to live in it so that we build forever friendships and point people to Jesus even when they throw a bucket of cold water on us. That is exactly what happened in our text, isn't it?

Philip doesn't debate the scriptural value of a town named Nazareth. He doesn't get into an argument over the relative merits of the people of Nazareth. He doesn't say, "You're an anti-Galilean because you are attacking a city from Galilee" even though it was close to their home town. He doesn't debate any of those things. He simply grabs

him by the hand and says, *“Come and see”*—patiently, in a simple message spoken in love. He says, *“Come and see for yourself and Jesus will be the one that does the convincing”*.

It’s the same way with us. We don’t have to do the convincing. We just have to point people to who Jesus is and what he has done for us. I can’t convince you and you can’t convince me. It is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit leads us to believe that Jesus lived and died in our place. Our job now is to humbly, patiently speak messages of love that say “come and see Jesus”. “Come and see him as we talk about the Word together” is something that we can say to a friend. Come and see him in our Bible study. Come and see him in a worship service, but by all means, please just come and see him. We can point people to the lamb.

Nathanael gets there and he is met by Jesus and even before he can say, “Hi. My name is Nathanael”, we are told that Jesus says, *“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”* What he is really saying is “here is an Israelite who is not just an Israelite by virtue of race or being a descendant from Abraham—here is a man who is a true Israelite because he believes what Israelites believe, and he is longing for the Messiah to come”. So Nathanael naturally reacts a little bit surprised. *“How do you know me?”* “I saw you before Philip came and talked to you while you were under the fig tree.” They would often go off by themselves to pray and meditate and see God as they would consider his Word and pray about it.

Jesus saw him before it would have been physically possible for him to be seen by the man Jesus. So Nathanael comes to the conclusion that this is not the man Jesus. This is the God-man. This is the promised Messiah. This is the one that, even though he is from Nazareth, his friend, Philip, was right. This is the one that Moses and the prophets wrote about who would be anointed by God to be the Messiah—the anointed one—the one who takes away sins.

Then Jesus makes an incredible promise to him—*“You shall see greater things than that. ...you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”*

They got to see it. They got to see Jesus and his miracles. They got to see his death. They got to see his resurrection. You and I get to see incredible things from God. You and I get to see his very body and blood, in, with and under the bread and wine as he says to us, “This takes away your sins.” You and I get to see a splash of water and heaven open as God works faith in an infant’s heart in a way that we can’t understand and we can’t explain, but because the Bible says that is what happens, we believe it. You and I get to see incredible things that we cannot explain or understand, but God has done it. You and I get to do it from the moment that God really brings us the gift of faith. As you think about it—it doesn’t take a great amount of training to be able to point people to Jesus. Yes, it is nice to get training. Yes, we don’t want to be lazy. We want to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. But a candle doesn’t start shining until after it has been trained to shine after it has been lit for a week or two. A candle starts

shining as soon as it is lit. When the Spirit shines into our hearts and brings us to faith, we are now equipped to say, “Jesus is the one. Come and see. Let me tell you what he has done for me.”

A simple message spoken in love—you and I have been given the message. You and I have been forgiven for the times we haven’t shared it. You and I are moved by the love God has shown to us to build those forever friendships, patiently, lovingly and reflecting the love Jesus has shown into our hearts.