

*“Our Invitation — ‘Come and See!’”*

Joel D. Kline writes, “Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday we celebrate this week, spoke with some frequency during his years of ministry of putting on the ‘weapon of love.’ Responding to those who resisted the emerging civil rights movement, **King asserted, ‘We will counter your force with soul force, we will match your ability to hate with our ability to love.’** And King reminded us that at the heart of Jesus’ life and message is the call to be **peacemakers and reconcilers**. Violence, said King again and again, **‘never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problems; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.’”**

After quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., Kline says, “We live in a world thirsty for this gospel of peace. With Martin Luther King, and with Jesus before him, we need to announce with integrity, ‘The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind. It is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than on love. It destroys community ... Violence ends by defeating itself.’” Kline concludes, “It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.” (Joel D. Kline, Come and See)

Today’s Reading continues the theme of Jesus gathering a group of disciples shortly after his baptism by John the Baptist. It raises the topic of prejudice in connection with ministry. It points us in the direction of discerning the authority of Jesus. It reports the promise the disciples would experience amazing things.

The Scripture begins with Jesus calling Philip to be a disciple. We are not given much information about the event. **Verse 43 simply states, “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, ‘Come with me!’”** The author tells us that like Andrew and Peter, Philip was from Bethsaida.

Possibly, the brothers, Andrew and Peter, knew Philip and helped Jesus find him. If this gospel was written by John, the son of Zebedee and John along with his brother, James, were fishing partners with Andrew and Peter, as Luke reported, then, the author most likely already knew Philip. It would be expected the four disciples of John, James, Andrew, and Simon Peter would naturally develop a friendship with Philip, if they had not already been friends.

Part of Philip’s higher profile in the Gospel of John is because he quickly got about the task of bringing others to meet his new teacher. Philip was also prominent in the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6:1-13. Further, Philip was the disciple, who introduced Jesus to the Greeks in John 12:20-26, resulting in Jesus publically praying aloud to his Divine Parent and then, God responded through a voice from heaven.

**In verse 45, today’s Reading states, “Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.’”**

We are told of Nathanael’s response in **verse 46a, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”** Philip was not deterred by his friend’s outspoken prejudice against Nazarenes, and so, he simply said in **verse 46b, “Come and see”**.

People in Galilee and Judea were extremely prejudiced toward Samaritans. With such societal permission for prejudice, one might expect Nathanael and many others to have their own negative views of specific groups of persons. Although Jesus was not present with Philip and Nathanael when those derogatory remarks were made, **Jesus quickly dispelled Nathanael’s dreadful view of the Nazarenes and went on to also model a welcoming hospitality and the allowing of all types of people share leadership. We do well when we follow our Lord’s example!**

Thomas G. Long describes a situation when Jesus’ example of radical hospitality was followed by a congregation. He writes, “A few years ago a church located in a large city decided to turn its gymnasium into a night shelter for homeless people. Every winter there were reports that some of these people, condemned to sleep out in the open, had frozen to death, and so the church made the warmth and safety of its building available without charge. Each evening during the winter, volunteers from the church would spend the night in the shelter, providing food, clothing, and lodging for as many of the homeless as the building would hold. Almost without exception, the volunteers reported that the experience of spending the night with these people from the streets had been far more than an act of dutiful charity. The volunteers had found their own faith strengthened, their own reliance upon the grace of Christ reinforced by the experience.”

Long continues, “Several months after the shelter was opened, one of the pastors of the church was being interviewed on a radio talk program. The interviewer was an opinionated fundamentalist whose biases were quite strong.” Long elaborates, “It became clear during the interview that he felt that the church ought to stick to the business of preaching the old-time gospel and stay away from meddlesome activities like shelters for homeless people. ‘Now just tell me,’ he jeered

at one point, ‘where is Jesus in all this?’ For a moment the pastor considered silently how to respond, then said calmly, **‘You just have to be there.’**”

Long indicates a connection between that pastor’s comments and the portion of today’s Scripture, when Philip said to Nathaniel, **“Come and see”**. Long concludes, **“some people do not see because they will not come to those places where one can get an angle of vision, where one can see the grace of Christ at work in the world.”** (Thomas G. Long, *Shepherds and Bathrobes*, CSS Publishing Co.)

Jesus discerned Nathanael’s personality even before he spoke to the Lord. **Verse 47 reports, “When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, ‘Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!’”** Nathanael was one who spoke his mind! Nathanael’s aggressiveness and bluntness was demonstrated when he responded in **48a, “How do you know me?”** Jesus’ response was simple, however, and its implications allude us because we do not know the context. For example, where was the fig tree located, at which Philip found Nathanael? Was it where Jesus could not see it? What’s clear is Nathanael believed Jesus had miraculous knowledge of him, for he said in **verse 49, “Teacher, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”**

Let’s take a moment to consider the implications from what Nathanael said in verse 49. Remember what was said, when Philip originally spoke to Nathanael about Jesus. Nathanael put voice to his prejudice against Nazarenes. However, Philip did not debate Nathanael about his beliefs, instead, he simply invited him to find out the truth for himself, by saying in **verse 46b, “Come and see”**. Philip’s non-threatening invitation was accepted by Nathanael. He did not need to spend much time with Jesus, because he almost immediately, **came to not only “see” but to declare his belief in Jesus as the Son of God and King!**

How do you suppose Philip learned to use this non-threatening, invitational approach, when he was faced with an argumentative response to his Good News? Perhaps Philip learned to do that because Andrew and maybe John, the son of Zebedee, were also natives of Bethsaida – like Philip. Indeed, they may have already been friends! They might have told Philip how Jesus said the same thing to them, when **Andrew and another disciple of John the Baptist asked Jesus where he lived. Jesus said to them earlier in chapter 1, verse 39, “Come and see”**.

After Nathanael declared Jesus to be the Son of God and King, the Gospel of John tells us Jesus responded with amazement or, at least, he acted like he was surprised. Jesus went on to promise in **vs. 50 - 51, “Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this! I am telling you the truth: you will see heaven open and God’s angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man.”**

This Text reminds us how we are also called to bring other persons to meet Jesus. Philip’s and Jesus’ examples of radical hospitality and nonthreatening invitation provide us important guidance, showing us how to fulfill our call to bring others to know Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This text also demonstrates **prejudice has no place in the Christian community**, especially not in our evangelism process, for ours is to be a radical, nonthreatening, and respectful invitation to be part of the Body of Christ – the Church. Jesus proved Nathanael’s prejudice against the Nazarenes was wrong. Instead of following the way of prejudice, disrespect, anger, and hate, Jesus repeatedly welcomed and treated with dignity and humble love everyone – even those who were used to being ridiculed, rejected, and treated as untouchable outcasts!

And so, I am happy to report, Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, seeks to welcome all people with respect and love! We value everyone. We, also, welcome the sharing of the God given gifts of skills, energy, and time from all of our participants in this diverse and united ministry!

So, when someone you know is in need of support, comfort, and nurture, share with them the invitation to come meet God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for them – the love manifested in God’s Son, Jesus the Christ. Let’s invite all people – family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and those rejected by the high and mighty religious folk in our society. **Invite everyone to join in our Worship Celebrations, fellowship and service activities, and love and support for one another using Jesus’ and Philip’s words, “Come and see.”** We, like Nathanael and the other original disciples, **“will see much greater things”!** Amen.