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Pastor

Sisters and brothers: If I had been one of the first disciples I would have hired a press agent. As it turned out I came along 1900 years later. The first disciples were stuck with the evangelists who did not sugar coat much.

St. Mark who wrote about 65 CE was merciless with Jesus' followers. Mark portrays them as about as clueless as Custer at the Little Bighorn.

St. Matthew and St. Luke who wrote about 85 CE are a little kinder. They probably sensed that the fledgling Christian community needed some heroes – albeit people with very clay feet.

St. John who writes about 100 CE is the kindest to the first disciples. They are not perfect, but John's portrait is of folks a little more able to be role models for the community.

In today's Gospel two of the disciples are featured. Philip and Nathaniel. Each seems like the kind of persons Jesus and the Church needed.

Philip has a Greek name. Given the fact he was from Galilee where competing cultures and international commerce created the most diversity in all Israel, it is possible Philip was a Greek proselyte – a convert to Judaism. At the very least his parents might have been.

The text doesn't suggest Philip knew anything about Jesus before this encounter. Jesus has just returned from an area near Jerusalem where John the Baptist was calling for a return to God.

When Jesus ends up in Galilee he meets Philip and with no fanfare Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me." The amazing thing is that Philip does.

Of course we know from the first verses of John's Gospel that Jesus is the Word of God. And we know that God's Word creates exactly what God

has in heart and mind. God creates this disciple as certainly as God created light in the beginning.

Philip follows Jesus – energized by God’s Word. And on the way Philip finds Nathaniel. Little enough is known about Nathaniel. He makes a cameo appearance here in the first chapter of John’s Gospel and is named among the disciples who join Jesus for a fish fry in the last chapter of the Gospel.

Nathaniel is described by Jesus as “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Nathaniel is one of those “what you see is what you get” persons. That was surely a blessing for Jesus and a model for future disciples.

Spend a few minutes with me looking at these disciples. What they offer and what they encourage.

Philip is called by Jesus and sticks around.

In Baptism you were called by Jesus. It was a Pastor who said your name, but it was God’s Word that was spoken into your unsuspecting ears and heart. You began your journey with Jesus – following him into this place.

Every Sunday bulletin welcomes people with the words, “It is not an accident that you are here.” If there are mistakes in the bulletin from time to time, that sentence is NOT one of them.

It is not an accident that you are here. Jesus called your name and nurtured you into this time and place. Jesus wanted you among Jesus’ own people and had plans for you in this place.

I know this isn’t always an easy place to be. Parishes are like families. There are different thoughts and feelings. Different visions of what God wants. Diverse personalities.

This place isn’t perfect. Good thing. If the place was perfect I would not be able to come here. And come to think of it neither would you.

I also know that being here requires hard work from time to time. Not always pleasant, but always necessary for the life and health of the community.

Do you ever feel like Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof?” Remember how he goes to the edge of the stage for one of his frequent conversations with God. Tevye says to God, “I know we are the Chosen People, but couldn’t you choose somebody else for a change?” Some days I look for the edge of the stage so God and I can talk.

Philip signs on with Jesus. He was not perfect. Life would not always be easy. Getting along with the other 11 disciples must have been a pain in the neck on occasion. But, he stuck around.

Part of what kept Philip around was the simple fact that he understood a little and then a lot that Jesus was the center of all life and experience. And when the center holds everything else can be kept in proper perspective. There is hope.

That was the blessing that more than made up for all the hardships. It is the blessing that is yours – even with all the ebb and flow of life here in the parish. You are centered in Jesus.

Philip also invited people. Later in John's Gospel some other Greeks come to Philip in hopes of being introduced to Jesus. Philip enables that to happen.

In today's Gospel Philip invites Nathaniel into the mystery of Jesus. Nathaniel is pretty cynical at first. "Can anything good come out of little backwater Nazareth?" Philip does not argue. He simply asks Nathaniel to "come and see."

Nothing complicated about evangelism when Philip does it. There doesn't need to be anything all that complicated about evangelism when we do it. "Come and see."

This parish is a blessing. Inviting others to enter into that blessings can be as simple as "come and see." See a worship space that invites prayer, reflection, and praise, and whose architecture puts Jesus front and center of all we are and all we do. See a congregation that cares for one another and reaches out to the poor. See people that laugh together and cry together. "Come and see."

Nathaniel does. So might the people you invite.

When Jesus sees Nathaniel coming he identifies Nathaniel as an "Israelite in whom there is no deceit." A special compliment given the fact that Jesus' experiences in the world will be full of people who turn deceit into an art form.

"An Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Not a bad model for our discipleship. No agendas that are hidden behind stated conversations. No lying. No rearranging realities so they are better or worse than they actually

are. No deceit. “What you see is what you get” should be a mark of our discipleship – with one another and with the world God loves.

At Faith, Bellingham, people would show up for worship on Sunday after an absence of months and months. I knew I would be hearing from them the following week. They wanted something more than an encounter with God and the people. They had an agenda.

People like that make me hold onto my wallet. They are not evil – just users. And when they were through using parish resources they would gone until the next time they wanted something.

That isn't discipleship – at least not as Nathaniel practiced it and Jesus wanted it.

Jesus speaks of seeing Nathaniel “under the fig tree.” That is an image fraught with significance. It is shorthand for the study of Scripture. And it is a picture of the time of God's realm coming near the earth.

Nathaniel was impressed. So much so that he makes the first full confession of faith about Jesus. “You are the Son of God.” Others will speak respectfully of Jesus calling him Rabbi. Some will move the conversation to naming Jesus as “Ruler of Israel.” Nathaniel goes all the way – seeing in Jesus whom he was invited to “come and see” the fullness of God present in the earth.

That confession is a mark of discipleship. “You are the Son of God.” It is what we say in the Creeds. It is who we honor with our praise. It is the one to whom we commend ourselves and others in prayer. It is this Son of God who needs to set the agenda for our life together and our life in the world. “You are the Son of God ... you are the fullness of God with us, working through us, calling us into the future.”

Philip and Nathaniel. Two disciples that are a credit to Jesus' mission and ministry. Not perfect, but faithful, and who can be models for us in our discipleship.

I know you already take Jesus and disciples like Philip and Nathaniel seriously. Continue to do so, and in God's good time you will get an invitation to a fish fry with Jesus, too.