

Pity poor Philip! Mentioned only 4 times in John's gospel, he is the Rodney Dangerfield of Jesus' disciples; not respected and given no credit. He is the straight man of the Smothers Brothers or Wayne and Garth. His role is to make others look good. Philip enters the story after Jesus makes his way north to Galilee. In the beginning steps of his ministry, he calls people to follow him.

Philip was a disciple of John the Baptist, looking for the Messiah, so when Jesus approaches him and says simply, "Follow me", Philip was curious enough to follow. He sees his old friend Nathaniel and urges Nathaniel to come follow Jesus too. Nathaniel is skeptical, downright cynical. Philip does not try to prove Jesus is Messiah but simply says, "Come and see."

Invitation is a powerful thing. When someone invites you to do something, you have to make a choice. Most times you hesitate, wondering if it will be worth the time or money. What makes you accept the invitation is the sincerity of the person who invited you. Philip tells Nathaniel about Jesus. Nathaniel cynically asks if anything good can come out of Nazareth, a rural village of a few hundred people. It was the sincerity of Philip's invitation that draws Nathaniel in.

In the Christmas story we again rehearsed the heart of our faith; that in Mary's child God became incarnate among us. The focus in Epiphany is on sharing the incredible news of the gospel with the world, but most of us do not see ourselves as bold witnesses to faith. Our own faith doesn't feel that strong and we are hesitant to talk about faith openly. Faith, however, was never meant to be kept safely inside. Just ask the angels, wisemen or the shepherds!

No one is born knowing about Jesus Christ. All people have to be told about him, so Christianity is spread by one voice to one heart. It is not done by judging, excluding, or by supposed moral superiority, but by the power of invitation, by words and actions that say, "Come and see."

This weekend we honor Dr. Martin Luther King. He did not seek fame but was made head of the Montgomery Improvement Association; starting the bus boycott after the incident with Rosa Parks. King was drawn into the civil rights movement. His call for justice invited America to become what it was intended to be. At the heart of King's work was his faith in Jesus Christ, and many were caught by the sincerity of his faith and life.

Think about all the "Philips" that have been part of your life; those people whose words and actions invited you to "Come and see." You were caught by their sincerity of faith and it helped you to be a Christian in the church.

The need for all Christians to be more like Philip is critical since we live in a world of Nathaniels. While it has been interesting to watch the candidates running in the GOP primaries, it has been more interesting to watch the voters. It appears that many Americans are looking at candidates very carefully, asking hard questions and not easily swayed by sound bites or party affiliation.

Many people, especially in America, are asking hard questions about matters of faith, too. Unwilling to simply accept what their parents or pastors say, and put off by the Christianity that makes the headlines in the form of errant priests or televangelists, they hesitate in embracing Christianity. Like Nathaniel, they ask, "Can any good come out of the church or the faith?"

It is the sincerity of your faith that can make the difference in overcoming their skepticism. People are more interested in matters of faith than you realize because all of us are asking the same questions, trying to make sense out of this life that surprises us with its randomness and unfairness. All people are looking for something to hold onto that will not change, which is what the gospel offers.

In Jesus, God offered an invitation to all people. In Him God gave us a glimpse into the divine heart of love and mercy. In Him, God said to each one of us “come and see,” and in doing so, we find a purpose, worth, and destination that nothing else can equal. Who do you know that needs to know the joy you have found in Christ? Who can you invite to “come and see”? The gospel you have is incredible news to share, giving courage to both living and dying.

Here is the rest of the story: Nathaniel was even lesser known than Philip; but maybe he was also called Bartholomew. Tradition says that after Pentecost, both Philip and Bartholomew traveled to India and Turkey sharing the gospel of Christ. Both of them, as were 11 of the 12 disciples, were killed for doing so. Philip was crucified and Nathaniel (Bartholomew) was skinned alive.

It was the power of invitation that changed their lives forever. Once they accepted the invitation to come and see, they were never the same again. They found something worth holding onto for both living and dying. The great good news of Jesus Christ still has the power to transform lives-both yours and the people whom your words and actions touch. Come and see! Go and tell!

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