

## **John 1:43-51**

1:43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

1:44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

1:46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

1:48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

1:49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

1:50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

1:51 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Round about two millennia ago, there was a man named John, a good man, full of wisdom and vision. John lived in the wilderness, and John shared a testimony of hope.

The evangelist tells us that the *Word*, or the *substance*, or the *umph* of God predates creation. God has been here even before the beginning; even before time; even before how we ever dreamed of marking time. And if that's not enough of a story starter, the evangelist tells us that this very same *substance*, this very same *umph*, this very same *Word*, has come, for a time, in human form, and will dwell among us. God is gonna be in our very midst.

Such a testimony provokes the curiosity (not to mention annoyance) of Jerusalem's political and religious establishment. "Who are you? What are you? Why are you?" the priests and Levites ask of John. "Not Messiah? Not a prophet like Elijah? By whose authority do you, can you claim such things?"

"I'm just a guy, a nobody, really," John says. "Like, Isaiah, I'm a voice crying out in the wilderness. I'm not so much meant to *do* something extraordinary, as much as I'm meant to *see* something special and tell others what I've seen. All my life, I've been waiting to see the One whom God's Spirit will fall fresh upon. I baptize with water, asking people to turn toward God, and wait with anticipation for God's creative and healing presence. I'll do that, until the day, when someone, much, much more important than me, will baptize with fire, offering the transcendent and transformative substance of the One who is always loving and creating."

John's vision comes to pass. John recognizes Jesus as God's anointed, because John sees the Spirit descend upon Jesus like a dove. And John

testifies, even to his own disciples, “Look, Here is the Lamb of God! You ought to follow this fellow.” So off Andrew, and another unnamed disciple go, shadowing Jesus.

“Where are you staying,” they ask Jesus. “Come and see,” Jesus says. And off they go, spending a day with Jesus. So taken by his day with Jesus, Andrew goes to find his brother Simon, whom Jesus will later rename Peter, proclaiming, “Brother, we have found Messiah!” And just like that, we have three disciples.

And just like that, we find Jesus ready to begin his ministry. And just like that, Millbrook, we find ourselves all set to dig into today’s reading.

It’d be hard to call today’s lectionary passage exciting, or full of high drama. On first appearance, it just kind of feels like Bruhs being Bruhs.

Hey Bruh, wanna go to Galilee?

Sure, Bruh.

Do you know any Bruhs that might want to come with us?

Bruh, I know just the Bruh to ask.

The Bruh that just got asked by the other Bruh, says, ‘Bruh, I’m not sure about Bruhs from Nazareth.’

Leader Bruh surprises Skeptical Bruh.

Bruh! How’d you know my name?

Bruh, that's nothing, just wait till you see what happens next!"

Not exactly what you call high drama. This conversation could happen at any place in any time. You don't have to try hard to imagine a group of buddies, or coworkers, or Bruhs of any category having this conversation in the parking lot of a Buc-ee's, or a Chick-fil-a, or even our own parking lot.

This morning's text is a footnote. But here's the thing, Millbrook. Last week we mentioned that God is revealed in the margins. Today, we learn that it's not just the vertical margins, but the horizontal ones, too! These little footnotes, the ones none of us read in college, might only be breadcrumbs, but they give us a feast of insight into God's remarkable vision for the world. We've got plenty to work with this morning.

For starters, Jesus, the anointed, human representative of God, one whom Israel has waited over 600 years for, in his very first official visit, his very first formal and public correspondence, chooses to go to Galilee. Galilee is a poor, rural fishing region without a major population center, and with limited influence among the social structures of Judea. It's remote. Actually, it's a half-hour drive past remote.

Marie Mason, a saint of Millbrook, used to talk about growing up in Hyde County, NC in the 20s and 30s, and how remote it was. She used to say that timber, water, fish, and farm animals were more common to see than people. That's the kind of image I conjure up of Jesus' trek through rural Israel.

But think about what this nugget tells us. God doesn't need, God isn't concerned with the amplifications or the expectations of the powers

that be. We learned over Christmas that Jesus is born in the margins. And when he grows up, he'll be announced by the marginalized and minister in the margins. Yes, our politicians will visit Iowa in the coming months to get a feel for the people. But Iowa ain't Galilee! Jesus ain't fishing for power. He's fishing for people.

Jesus decides to go to Galilee. And before he goes, he finds Philip, and says, "Follow me." Jesus finds. Jesus is active. Jesus determines to engage his neighbors: to identify them by name, to acknowledge their giftedness, and to invite them into a life of service. You think Herod, or Caesar, or the Pharaohs of old go looking for followers? Don't you imagine they prefer for people to come to them? And don't they usually summon rather than invite?

Jesus comes into the world subtly announced. Jesus travels to ordinary and real places. Jesus invites others into God's ministry as real partners.

And guess what? These partners act like partners. Yesterday, Andrew and a companion ask to see where Jesus stays. His response: "Come and see." Today, Philip seeks out Nathanael, telling him of the One he believes to be Messiah. Philip uses the phrase, "Come and see." This line will be repeated by other newly-minted believers throughout John's gospel. Jesus not only extends a radical sense of hospitality and partnership to those whom he encounters, but his new followers soon become an extension of that very same hospitality and partnership. People aren't just invited to hear or see good news. They are invited to experience good news, even become it.

Guess what else? Jesus isn't concerned about our expectations, or our permission, or our traditions. Nor is Jesus troubled by our skepticism, or

our pessimism, or our doubt. Jesus doesn't need to win. Jesus doesn't hold grudges.

Go ahead and believe nothing good can come out of Nazareth. Go ahead and come to him by cover of darkness. Go ahead and wait, go ahead and process, go ahead and ask all the questions you need to. Jesus doesn't view our inner-workings as petulance or disobedience. Jesus knows our wonderings and our wanderings will not be our final destination. Cause Lord knows, Jesus did his own wondering and wandering, too!

Nathanael makes a snarky remark. He thinks of Nazareth like most of us think of South Carolina – What's the best thing to ever come out of South Carolina? I-85 North. We tend to limit God only to what we can comprehend and expect. God will be in the pretty, and the perfect, and the polite, and the comfortable. More accurately, our pretty, and our perfect, and our polite, and our comfortable.

This little nugget tells us God's got a lot more humility and patience than us. Jesus invites us into a kin-dom that defies AND exceeds our expectations. Jesus doesn't expect us to receive all of this in an instant. Rather, Jesus continues to introduce us to moments, windows, and every-day encounters that reveal God's wonderful mystery.

Finally, the text tells us this isn't a gospel of parlor tricks. The fig tree is a helpful mnemonic – Nathanael loves figs! Tomorrow, water into wine will be impressive. Sight for the blind isn't too shabby either. And even Lazarus will cheat death. But none of it, none of it can outshine this: light will shine in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

And one dark and dreary morning, Mary, like Nathanael, and so many before her, will hear the Risen Lord call her by name, and in that very instant – the speaking and hearing of her name – the mystery of God will be revealed to her. And she will tell everyone she meets, “Come and see!”

The audacity of Mary’s tale will be met with skepticism. Even the disciples will doubt her tale. No matter. Like Jesus before her, she knows that plenty of good, even if unexpected will come from Nazareth. For she has seen the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. And soon enough, so shall we!

Today’s text is a footnote. But it’s one worth remembering. We want God to be revealed at 5:30 p.m. every Christmas Eve, when the candles burn bright, and we’ve hit the perfect note on Silent Night, and our children have not yet spilled the green bean casserole all over their Christmas best, and the camera’s lens can’t yet catch our candidness, our unguardedness, our messiness.

What today’s text tells us is that God isn’t revealed in pageants and presentations. God is revealed in ordinary people, in ordinary places, in ordinary events. In other words, God is revealed in the messiness and unexpectedness of life.

As we enter a new year together, let’s resolve to travel to remote places; to invite one another in a partnership of gift-sharing; to come and see for ourselves; and to wait, not for the God we expect, but rather, to live, wholly and fully, as God expects of us.

Who’s ready to go to Galilee? Amen.