

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JANUARY 17, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* Setting: Jan Bender

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #901 *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty*

- 1 **Open now thy gates of beauty;
 Zion, let me enter there,
 Where my soul in joyful duty
 Waits for Him who answers prayer.
 Oh, how blessèd is this place,
 Filled with solace, light, and grace!**
- 2 **Gracious God, I come before Thee;
 Come Thou also unto me.
 Where we find Thee and adore Thee,
 There a heav'n on earth must be.
 To my heart, O enter Thou;
 Let it be Thy temple now!**
- 3 **Here Thy praise is gladly chanted;
 Here Thy seed is duly sown.
 Let my soul, where it is planted,
 Bring forth precious sheaves alone,
 So that all I hear may be
 Fruitful unto life in me.**
- 4 **Thou my faith increase and quicken;
 Let me keep Thy gift divine,
 Howsoe'er temptations thicken;
 May Thy Word still o'er me shine
 As my guiding star through life,
 As my comfort in all strife.**
- 5 **Speak, O God, and I will hear Thee;
 Let Thy will be done indeed.
 May I undisturbed draw near Thee
 While Thou dost Thy people feed.
 Here of life the fountain flows;
 Here is balm for all our woes.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Brief silence for reflection and self-examination.

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:

We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:

You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.

For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,

You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God,
who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON 1 Samuel 3:1-10

The young man Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the young man. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 139:1-10

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be enslaved by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

**Alleluia.
Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.
Alleluia, alleluia.**

GOSPEL John 1:43-51

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 1st chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.
Dear friends in Christ:

Today is the first of two Sundays in which we hear about Jesus calling his first disciples. We hear about it today from John's Gospel account. Next Sunday we will hear about it from Mark's.

Today's text begins with Jesus calling Philip, which he does by simply saying: "follow me." Philip does follow – and is obviously very excited about what he has discovered, because he goes and tells Nathaniel: "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote."

Philip's claim about Jesus – that he is the one to come, sent by God, as prophesied in scripture – seems like a lot to discern in a short period of time. How could he know this about Jesus after just meeting him? But Philip is not the only one making quick judgments. Right before this, Jesus called Andrew, who says to his brother: "we have found the Christ." Nathaniel, too, comes to a quick conclusion about Jesus, saying to him: "you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

These judgments may or may not have been made as quickly as they are presented here. We can't say for sure. What we can say is that these claims about Jesus are bold. They make big claims about Jesus. Their listing here, at the beginning of the Gospel, no doubt serves as a challenge to the reader to see their truth as the story of Jesus unfolds.

Having said this, I would like us to focus today on a different aspect of the text. I would like us to examine it for what it teaches us about conversion – about how people come to Christ.

When people come to Christ, they do so first because Christ has called them. Today's text says that Jesus: "found Philip and said to him 'follow me.'" Jesus finds people and invites them.

Sometimes this finding of people comes through another person. Andrew went and told his brother Simon, who, as we know, was also known as Peter. Philip went and found his friend Nathaniel, who, by the way, was also known as Bartholomew.

You, too, most likely first encountered Jesus through the witness of another. Perhaps it was your mom or dad. Perhaps it was a grandparent. Perhaps it was a pastor. Perhaps it was an author. Perhaps it was a friend. We are grateful for those who witnessed to us about Christ.

At the same time, each of us has also encountered Jesus on our own. We have heard his invitation to follow him and have made our own decision about this. To be clear, it was the Holy Spirit who opened our hearts to enable our faith. But our own will has been involved as well.

When Philip was asked to follow Jesus, he was asked to follow him quite literally – by walking in Jesus' steps as he traversed the region and engaged the people. Philip was to watch what Jesus did and listen to what Jesus said. Eventually, he was to assist Jesus in what Jesus was doing.

Like Philip, we too have heard Christ's call to follow him and have responded. We walk with Jesus by faith. We do this as we listen to accounts of what he did and said, as recorded in the scriptures. And we do this by giving our best efforts to live his message and assist him in his work.

Sometimes following Jesus is easy. It seems natural and right and doesn't come with great challenges or questions. These are the times we feel confident about our faith and openly share it with others.

At other times following Jesus is difficult. These are the times when the message may not make sense to us or when we feel alone in our following.

Philip, Nathaniel and all the other disciples certainly had times of questioning too. In today's text we hear a question from Nathaniel. Upon finding out that Jesus was from Nazareth, Nathaniel said: "What good can come from Nazareth?" While today we might hear this response as good-natured ribbing at the expense of a small town, it actually echoed a much bigger objection. In the seventh chapter of his Gospel (v. 40-43), John tells us that when some people heard Jesus speak, they said: "This really is the Prophet" and others said, "This is the Christ." But others said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" This caused a division among the people and showed the strong objection to a savior from Nazareth. Indeed, when Jesus was sent to the cross, the Roman Governor had a sign placed above him that read: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Listing the town was a way of trying to discredit Jesus.

We may not have that same concern. But we probably have others. We may wonder if Jesus is really sent by God. Or if the scriptures really give an accurate account of him. We may wonder if Jesus' teachings are really all that great. We may wonder if the movement Jesus started is really all that helpful. These are just some of the endless questions about Jesus which one might ask.

This summer I watched a video series about Jesus called "The Chosen." The series has eight episodes, each about 50 minutes in length, all of which tell stories from the Gospels about Jesus calling someone to faith. You can find the episodes on YouTube or download an app with the same name and get the episodes off the web directly. They're free. At the end you'll have a chance to give an offering if you'd like. Just like church!

To build the story and the characters, and to communicate what life was like in those days, the episodes all add lots of extra dialogue not found in the scriptures. I don't find that to be a problem. In fact, I think the dialogue is helpful and well done.

None of the episodes focus on our text today, although it seems to me that one of them may include the line "what good can come from Nazareth." Lots of Biblical material is worked in over the course of the series. One connection, however, is the shared message that people come to faith in different ways. In today's text, Philip appears to come to faith rather easily. Nathaniel, on the other hand, has questions. In the video series, the future disciples of Jesus are all wrestling with different challenges in their life. And then Jesus comes to them. And extends his help. And shows them a better way.

And this point about coming to faith in different ways reminds us, too, that conversion is not always about overcoming intellectual questions, like it was for Nathaniel. Rather, conversion occurs more often out of the simple fact that Jesus helps us. We need to remember this, because ultimately, we will not be able to find answers to all our questions. Some things will need to be accepted by faith. What we can observe as evidence, however, is the help Jesus brings.

Jesus helps in many ways. Sometimes it comes in a seemingly miraculous way, like it did in many of the Biblical stories. But not always. Sometimes it just comes through very normal means, like self-awareness that we're led to, or peace in one's heart, or acceptance by others, or an action or discipline Jesus commends that pays off in the end.

In Nathaniel's case, it came because Jesus said he saw him under the fig tree. About this, commentators have always had the sense that this must mean more than just Jesus' miraculous ability to see someone's physical location and know their conversations. But there is no clear consensus on what it might mean instead. Some think that "sitting under the fig tree" refers to a strong desire on the part of Nathaniel to be a God-fearing man, much like the phrase Jesus used when he said, "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Others think it refers to a place of sinfulness and shame on Nathaniel's part, much as Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves after their sin. I have

always felt most drawn to St. Ambrose's explanation. He said that it refers to "the tempting attraction of the pleasures of the world." This one makes sense to me, because in the Old Testament, sitting under the fig tree is a sign of prosperity. And maybe I'm also drawn to this explanation because in our community and in our nation, I see so many people who are prosperous and comfortable and feel they have no need for God.

The greatest help Jesus gives, as we always say, is the forgiveness of our sins. We could not pay the price for sin on our own. Nor do we have to. Jesus died on the cross to earn the forgiveness of our sins. Because of this, we won't suffer their eternal consequences. And we can put away the guilt from them that would otherwise smother us. What's more, this forgiveness moves us to forgive others, so that relationships can be restored, and trust renewed.

Let us conclude with one final thought. Jesus said to Nathanael: "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And then he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Last Sunday we heard about one of those times when the heavens were opened. They were opened at Jesus' baptism, when God spoke and declared Jesus to be his beloved Son.

Reading through the Gospels, the next time the heavens were opened is... never. Or at least there is no use of that language in the Gospels. And yet we know God was still working. And great things were being done.

Perhaps this can remind us that the great things Jesus is doing will not always be seen. Or that the things he does will not always seem so impressive. The heavens may seem like they are closed – God keeping his distance. But God is still active among us. The promise remains.

Through Jesus, God does great things. He calls us to faith. He forgives our sins. He teaches us a better way. He encourages us each day. He is in control, making his ways known.

May these gifts from the Lord God strengthen and sustain your faith. And may God bless you in your following of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #402 The Only Son from Heaven

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 The only Son from heaven,
Foretold by ancient seers,
By God the Father given,
In human form appears.
No sphere His light confining,
No star so brightly shining
As He, our Morning Star.</p> | <p>3 O Lord, our hearts awaken
To know and love You more,
In faith to stand unshaken,
In spirit to adore,
That we, through this world moving,
Each glimpse of heaven proving,
May reap its fullness there.</p> |
| <p>2 O time of God appointed,
O bright and holy morn!
He comes, the king anointed,
The Christ, the virgin-born,
Grim death to vanquish for us,
To open heav'n before us
And bring us life again.</p> | <p>4 O Father, here before You
With God the Holy Ghost
And Jesus, we adore You,
O pride of angel host:
Before You mortals lowly
Cry, "Holy, holy, holy,
O blessed Trinity!"</p> |

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING The Only Son from Heaven Setting: Marcel Dupré

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O Lord, we rejoice that You have called us into the fellowship of Your Son. By His incarnation and redeeming death, heaven has been opened to all who believe. Give us boldness in what we say and do, that Your deliverance would shine freely in all the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, Send forth laborers into Your harvest and sustain those You have sent, especially Matthew, our Synod president; John, our district president; Andrew, our circuit visitor, and all pastors and church workers. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father, we give thanks that sustain us and all mankind through the gift of marriage. Strengthen all husbands and wives in their love and faithfulness, bless their children and all children with safe and loving homes, and help us all to protect the most vulnerable and the unborn. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, every lawful authority on earth comes from You. Bless this good land and all who lead her, especially Joseph, our president-elect; Kamala, our vice-president-elect; all public servants, our armed forces, police and first responders. Help them and all of us to work peaceably for the good of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, behold in mercy all for whom we pray [*especially _____*]. Bring healing, comfort, strength, healing and patience to all in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, renew the gift of Your Holy Spirit for all who commune this week. Work in us true contrition that laments our sins; forgive us and heal us. Bless us as we come in faith to feast upon the heavenly food in this Holy Sacrament and send us from this place powerfully renewed. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #825 Rise, Shine, You People

- 1 Rise, shine, you people! Christ the Lord has entered
Our human story; God in Him is centered.
He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded,
With grace unbounded.**
- 2 See how He sends the pow'rs of evil reeling;
He brings us freedom, light and life and healing.
All men and women, who by guilt are driven,
Now are forgiven.**
- 3 Come, celebrate, your banners high unfurling,
Your songs and prayers against the darkness hurling.
To all the world go out and tell the story
Of Jesus' glory.**
- 4 Tell how the Father sent His Son to save us.
Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us.
Tell how the Spirit calls from ev'ry nation
His new creation.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Rise, Shine, You People Setting: David Cherwien

Acknowledgments

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