

What Will Make Your Heart Sing?

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Epiphany 2B: 1Samuel 3:1-18, John 1:43-51

I. Called to be Evangelists

You know we southerners are famous for our use of niceties, pleasantries, and euphemisms. For some of a certain breed of Southerner the civil war is still referred to as the “Great Unpleasantness.” I once knew a woman who had a whole vocabulary of “whisper words.” These were things that proper women shouldn’t say in public, but they say them anyway. For instance, she might talk about her son and his ex-wife this way, “Since the two of them finalized the *divorce* (whispered)…” Or, she might say in talking to a group of friends about another friend Martha, “Now since she had her surgery, Martha has put on a little *weight* (whispered).”

Well, today’s scripture is about one of those words about which most Presbyterian-type Christians are a little uncomfortable. Today’s passages are both about calling and *evangelism* (whispered)! Yes, evangelism. Evangelism is something that sparked movements like Methodism. John Wesley, the father of the Methodists, reminded believers that evangelism is a task of every Christian. So leave it to our resident Methodist, John O’Kain, who pointed out to me that the current mission goals adopted by Oakland Avenue does not overtly call us to evangelize. While it does strongly include establishing a campus ministry outreach and bringing good news through mission work, it does not make it a top goal to evangelize- to call people outside of our own to follow Christ. Well, today we cannot whisper our way out of it. The gospel of John clearly sets before us a challenge to share the Good News of Jesus in the story of the calling of the disciples.

The good news for us is that the Scripture shows us through the work of Jesus that evangelism is really not as hard as it sounds. In this passage it is about inviting others: your neighbors, your brother, your friend, to come and see what is happening in the kingdom of God. One person points the way to another. Or to put as one Christian has, evangelism is simply one beggar telling another where to find food.

You may remember that it was John the Baptizer who was preparing the way for Jesus- “the one greater than I,” says John. When Jesus shows up at the Jordan river, John exclaims, “Here he is, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!!” So John introduces two of his disciples to Jesus, the one they have been waiting for.

When Jesus asks Andrew and another, what they are looking for, they address Jesus as “Rabbi.” *Rabbi* means teacher and these two become his disciples at Jesus’ invitation. When Andrew and friend ask Jesus where his is staying, Jesus simply says, “Come and see.” And the pattern is set. Jesus invites them to come with him and see what God is doing. Come and see.

Then others pass on the news of Jesus. Andrew and the other disciple meet Jesus, and Andrew is then inspired to go find his brother, Simon Peter. When Andrew approaches Simon Peter interestingly Andrew says, we have found him, the Messiah. Jesus is Rabbi and Messiah. Jesus reveals himself to each as they are able to receive him. Remember in the first encounter Jesus asks, “What are you looking for?” Jesus shares himself as each is able to receive him.

The calling of disciples continues. Jesus goes and finds Philip. Jesus says, “Follow me.” Philip goes to Nathanael and invites him to meet Jesus. We learn more about who Jesus is when Philip announces, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and the prophets also wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.

With each invitation a little more is revealed about the identity of Jesus. He is “Rabbi”. He is the Messiah. He is the ONE about whom Moses and the prophets wrote. He is Joseph’s boy- you know, from Nazareth. “Come and see.” Philip says to Nathanael. That is how evangelism happens. One invites another to come and see, to follow, to see who God is and what God is up to. We have made something very simple into something very scary. Evangelism is inviting others to meet Jesus and then following him.

II. Jesus’ Identity and Nature of his Ministry

Now let’s back up to Nathanael and Philip. Philip mentions that Jesus is Joseph’s son, from Nazareth. Nazareth??? Nazareth? “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael says.

Nathanael obviously thinks little of Nazareth – to use a non-biblical term – it was Podunk, Israel...a backwater town, set in the plains – not much there, but a Roman garrison. Nathanael, being a good Israelite probably expected a more spectacular place from which Messiah comes like Jerusalem or Bethlehem, not little ol’ Nazareth.

Now if you have ever been judged by your hometown, your blood pressure might be going up. I cannot claim to be from Nazareth, but we all have perpetuated prejudice at some time and sometimes been the recipient of prejudice perhaps. I can remember the feeling of a fall Friday night sitting in the stands of my High School football stadium as a teenager in my hometown of York, SC. After the teams ran onto the field and the game was about to begin, a rowdy crowd entered the visitor team’s side. Their faces were painted in yellow and purple. They had hoped to make a big entrance. I remember very little about Friday nights at High School football games, but I remember that night. What stands out most is the words spray painted on the banner that they proudly carried in. It read, “DIE YORK REDNECKS.”

The reason I remember that so vividly is because it seemed overly hateful to me at the time. But I remember it because it was a label that many small, Podunk townsfolk get...rednecks. It was obviously derogatory. While that may seem mild and insignificant now, it made me aware that people who are labeled know the sting of prejudice.

Lesson number one folks: when God's own son, the Messiah, and King of Israel is from Nazareth, of all places, Christians cannot judge a person on the basis of rumor, reputation, or family. The very hometown of Jesus reveals tons about who he is and his ministry. This Messiah may not be what Nathanael expected, but Jesus reveals the true character and identity of the God of the Universe even in the very beginning of his ministry. When Jesus says come and see what I am about, Jesus' message would be clear. He saw people as God sees them.

To the adulteress about to be stoned, Jesus sees a sinner standing among other sinners in need of forgiveness. Instead of condemnation, he offers mercy and saves her.

To Peter who betrays him in his final hours, Jesus sees a faithful friend, a rock, one whom he entrusts to feed his sheep and upon which to build the church.

Instead of the despised tax collector, Zaccheus, Jesus sees a child of Abraham, a disciple-in-training, and someone with whom he will share a meal.

When Jesus calls us to follow him, to come and see, we will see the world and each other in a whole new way. He gives us the vision and the eyes that define the world as God sees it.

III. Called to Be Disciples

What amazes me is Jesus' interactions with Nathanael. He treats Nathanael with the same respect and care with which he treated the adulteress woman or the despised tax collector. Jesus knows Nathanael and recognizes that Nathanael is an honest Israelite – a person of the Jewish faith, who expects and hopes for the Messiah, God's anointed one who would come to save them. Jesus had seen him under the fig tree before Philip called Nathanael. Jesus sees Nathanael in a new light. He sees something special about him. It is not Philip's persuasive description of Jesus that gets to Nathanael. Nathanael was not at all impressed with Jesus being from Nazareth. Nor was it even Nathanael's observations about Jesus that make the difference. It is Jesus who finds Nathanael, sees the true person, and calls him to be a disciple.

I recently saw a movie about calling and discipleship. *Amazing Grace* is the story behind the beloved hymn. The young William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament, is the champion of the anti-slavery movement in England in the 1800s. What is most interesting is his conversion to Christ behind this important cause. As a child, Wilberforce had a pastor named, John Newton, a former slave ship captain. During a raging storm Newton made a commitment to follow Christ, to repent of his actions of enslaving Africans, and to become a pastor. Wilberforce was influenced by Newton as a youth. In one scene Wilberforce is feeling very conflicted about his calling and discusses this with his butler. Wilberforce confesses that he would rather commune with God above attending meetings of Parliament. The butler responds, "Sounds like you have found God, sir" Wilberforce responds, "I think God found me."

Wilberforce struggled with whether he was called to ministry or to work as a public servant as a Member of Parliament. He shared this with others over dinner and a good Quaker woman reminded him that he could do both. Wilberforce had seen the ravages and sin of slavery as it had affected the slave ship captain. Then he chose to see for himself what the how the slave was treated. After seeing for himself, he was a changed man. He now saw the truth of the situation, and he had to do something about it. He had found his calling.

You may have heard of Wilberforce's famously converted slaved ship captain turned pastor, John Newton. Newton wrote the hymn, *Amazing Grace*. Both men, John Newton and William Wilberforce can sing those words, "I once was lost but now I am found, was blind, but now I see."

When you have been found by God, you cannot help but see the world and your part in it in a whole new way. Wilberforce gave his life to work for the freedom of slavery and the protection of the weak. His work grew out of his call to be a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ.

Newton's conversion to Christ called him to leave his job as captain of a slave ship and to write a hymn which told of his being saved. What will make your heart sing? What is it that you love to do? What is it that you dream of that would be of benefit to a world in much need of the Good News of Jesus Christ?

IV. What will Make Your Heart Sing?

I borrow that question, "What will make your heart sing?" from the Lilly Endowment which funds Clergy Renewal so that churches and clergy are able to offer sabbaticals. Oakland Avenue Presbyterian church participated in a sabbatical in the summer of 2006 you may remember. When a pastor applies to the program, the main question for the applicant is, "What will make your heart sing?"

Think back to Nathanael and his calling. He was sitting under a fig tree- a place of rest of renewal when Jesus called him. I wonder what Nathanael was dreaming about under that fig tree when he met Jesus? He was dreaming and hoping for something more, I think. He was dreaming of the coming Messiah perhaps. That is why Jesus appeared to know him and convinced Nathanael to profess his faith in Jesus.

All important movements have started with a dream, a hope.

Nathanael dreamed of a Messiah.

Abraham and Sarah dreamed of many descendents.

Washington dreamed of an independent country free of tyranny.

Edison dreamed of the electric light bulb.

Wilberforce dreamed of a world where people were not treated like property.

Mother Teresa dreamed of a place for orphans, the sick, and the dying to be treated with dignity and respect.

Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamed of an America based on our faith in God, where all men and women regardless of race would have the same rights. And on Tuesday, more

of that dream will be realized when the first person of color will take the oath of office – a historic day for our country – a day that will remind us that a person should be judged on the content of his or her character and not the color of the skin.

All of these people were ordinary people who allowed their God-given talents to be used for something extraordinary.

Every great movement in history has come about because someone dared to dream a dream and dared to believe that with God's help, it might come true. So what would make your heart sing? This the first question to help find your calling. As Frederick Beuchner says about calling and vocation, "Calling is where your deep gladness and the world's deep need meet." Where can your deep gladness and the world's need meet?

I know of some dreams that have come true for God's purposes right here in our community.

Dave, a physician, saw a need for dignified care for adults. He dreamed of a place for these adults and their families, and the Park Avenue Adult Day Care was born.

Kate went through a difficult divorce and saw others struggling, too. She offered her talents and became a Stephen Minister. She meets with her care-receiver once a week and offers prayer and conversation for support.

Sue, an educator, saw a need for local children to have one on one tutoring and the STAR tutoring program was born. STAR happens here each Wednesday and Thursday.

Keith saw his neighbor struggling and searching for God, and he invited him to church.

Anna saw how her skills with children and experiences could be used for God's work. She dreams of going into ministry and will attend seminary this summer

Rene and other community leaders saw a need for hungry school children to have food over the weekend. They dreamed of a way to address it here in the Rock Hill School district, and the Back the Pack for Hunger program was born.

Bob, Art, and other Presbyterians saw neighborhoods being built in the north Lancaster county area and dreamed of a worshiping church family. The Faith Presbyterian Church was born.

Bo, Nellie Claire, and some of you saw the textile mills shutting down and people without work, and they dreamed of Christians trying to assist. Helping Other People Effectively or HOPE was born. 5 days a week our neighbors in need are served by Christians seeking to serve Christ.

Followers are called by Jesus to come and see what is going on, to see as Jesus the Messiah sees. When you see with the eyes of Christ, your heart may be broken by the

things that break the heart of Jesus, but they will also see the joys that only faith can bring. Each of us, you and I, are called to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. Yes, we are even commanded to share the gospel and to take the light of Christ into the world.

In closing, I share a story.

A little girl was given one line at the annual Christmas pageant. Her one line was, “Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world.’” She got flustered when it was her turn and stopped after “Jesus said.” Her mother sitting on the front pew was mouthing the line, “I am the light of the world,” to help her daughter. The child in confidence burst forth exclaiming, “Jesus said, ‘My mother is the light of the world!’”

It’s true. Jesus said it. “You are the Light of the World!”

Go and be the light of Christ and share the light with the world.

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