

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
January 14, 2018 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, Year B Psalm 139; John 1:43-51

Let us pray.
Grant us, O God, to hear your voice,
and in hearing your voice to love your word,
and in loving your word to do your will
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Do you remember back a decade or two or three when there were billboards all over the country that simply stated, "I found it"? It was a media campaign by Campus Crusade for Christ and eventually they answered the question with the answer that they had found Jesus. Of course there was kickback with bumper stickers that read, "I never lost it." And I'm sure there was more than one sermon that argued whether or not we find Jesus (who isn't really an IT, but a person) or that Jesus finds us.

As Lutherans, we might argue the latter. God comes to us. God calls us. We answer God by following that call. But in our gospel reading today—and in the verses that come before that passage—we see that discipleship really is a two-way street.

John the Baptist recognized Jesus when he came to the Jordan River to be baptized, and John declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The next day John points Jesus out to two of his disciples—one of whom was Andrew. Andrew went to get his brother Simon Peter and told him, "We have found the Messiah."

The next day, as we heard this morning, Jesus found Philip and gave him the calling to follow him. Then Philip found Nathanael and said, "We have found him about whom Moses and prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael is doubtful about anyone that comes from Nazareth, but then Jesus finds or recognizes him when he was sitting under a fig tree.

Do you sense that back and forth? Sometimes it seems as though a person might find or recognize Jesus. Sometimes Jesus comes to us, finding us and knowing us for who we are and what we are going through.

That's what relationships are all about. There is a give and take. Think about a particular friend or your spouse or even your children. Over time we reveal something about ourselves to another person when we come to trust them. Or sometimes we discover something new about the other that is like meeting them again for the first time.

I don't think we find or meet Jesus just once in our lives. Jesus comes to us—and we seek Jesus out—over and over again. In John's gospel, discipleship is all about relationship.

And how do we know when we've found Jesus or when Jesus has found us? That sense of discovery and knowing seems to be rather miraculous to both Jesus and Nathanael.

“When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’” (Jn 1:47) How could Jesus know that?

As the psalmist wrote, “Lord, you have searched me out; you have known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.”

Jesus is the very heart of God, so it is no surprise to us as readers of this gospel that Jesus would know Nathanael even before having a personal encounter with him.

But can we translate the same thing in our relationship with God? What does it mean to know that Jesus knows your every movement, your every thought?

We guard some things about ourselves from the people around us, but then the psalmist has us speak this truth to God, “You encompass me, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.”

Our lectionary skipped the part of the Psalm that says this:

⁷Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Yet, we are still often surprised when Jesus finds us—in the depths of whatever hell we find ourselves, in our despair, or when we are far from home. Jesus knows us, he knows where we are, and he finds us.

In the midst of Nathanael’s doubt Jesus finds him, and Nathanael finds Jesus, recognizing him as the Son of God, the King of Israel.

C.S. Lewis, author of the Chronicles of Narnia and a number of other important Christian books, spent much of his young life as an atheist. His mother died when he was just 9 years old. Jack, as he was known by friends and family, prayed to God to heal her and when she died he decided that either God isn’t there, or if He is there, he’s cruel.

Jack served in WWI and his best friend died in battle. This experience gave him more reason to doubt the existence of God.

But God knew Jack. God had formed him and knit him together with a vivid imagination and a love for literature. God had been with him in the hell of war. When he returned to England and recovered from his own injuries, he began to teach at Oxford University. It was there that God surrounded him with key friends, including J.R.R. Tolkien.

Tolkien was one of a number of friends, sent by God to Jack who said in many and various ways, “Come and see! Come and see Jesus, the God whom I know to be true, who knows you and loves you.”

Through his relationships with these trusted friends, C.S. Lewis came not only to see that there could be a god, but that in Jesus Christ God had come into the world, to know us and to love us—in the good times and in the dark times.

Jack then used the gifts God had given him to extend his own invitation to millions of readers. With his vivid imagination in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, his clever wit in *The Screwtape Letters*, and with deep compassion in *A Grief Observed* C.S. Lewis says to his readers, “Come and see the one I have found, the one true God!”

But when Jesus finds us he often surprises us.

Jesus invited us to “come and see” how to care for someone going through a time of struggle. Nine people heard that invitation and followed Jesus into our Stephen Ministry program.

Jesus invited us to “come and see” what life is like for many families and children in our community when we heard from McKenna Sheridan of Child & Family Services last Sunday. Two people answered that invitation and are following Jesus to the home that is in need of new flooring.

Jesus invited several people to “come and see” what the fellowship of believers looks like in this congregation and how we live out our callings here and in our daily lives. These newcomers will begin meeting together this morning after worship. They will have the opportunity to raise their questions, speak their doubts, and learn what it might mean for them to be a disciple of Jesus with us.

Every week, Jesus invites all of us to “come and see,” to remember his life, death, and resurrection, and to receive forgiveness and new life in the bread and wine.

As we leave this place today, seek Jesus in the places you go. He is already there! And if you don’t find him, don’t be surprised when he finds you!

Thanks be God! Amen