

*Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York*  
*Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead, New York*  
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*The Second Sunday after Epiphany B – January 17, 2021*

*1 Samuel 3:1-20, Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, John 1:43-51*

Grace to you and peace, from God the Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. C: Amen.

Jesus **finds** Philip. Philip **finds** Nathanael. Philip tells Nathanael that “We have **found** him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote... .” Then Jesus **finds** Nathanael under the fig tree and the new disciple **finds** out that Jesus already knows a great deal about him even before they’ve met. Jesus goes on to find other people in John’s Gospel, like the woman at the well in Samaria (4:7-39) and the man born blind near the temple in Jerusalem (9:1-38). But let’s stay where we are in Galilee for now.

What does it mean for Jesus to **find** someone? We speak about that experience as being “called,” as becoming a disciple of Jesus. It happened in the first century and it has happened in the more than 2000 years since.

What does it feel like to be **found** by Jesus? Well, all of you have been found by Jesus, so what would you say it feels like? For many of us, it was an experience that occurred through our parents when we were babies and were presented for baptism, and we might not have known that we were being **found** at the time. For others, it might have been like a great awakening, an eye-opening and mind-expanding jolt that captured our entire being.

For some of us, after being found, we got lost again. That happened to me for about 13 years after I graduated from high school. But you know what, Jesus didn’t lose me – I just lost my bearings in relationship to him. But when my wandering was over, he was right there, waiting for me. And that was truly a life-changing experience for me.

It’s kind of like being lost when you’re a child and being found by your parents. That happened to me, too, when I was about five years old. I was in a department store with my mother, bored with her efforts to find a new dress so I began a game of my own, climbing and crawling under the dress racks, moving from one to another, pretending I was – I don’t even recall what or where I thought I was. But it thoroughly engaged my imagination and I disobeyed my mother’s clear instruction to “stay right here next to me, Marianne.” Before I knew it, when I

looked for my mother, I couldn't find her. Panic! I let out a "Mom!" and she recognized my voice, of course, and called me back to where she still was standing. What relief! Can you just hear that line from the hymn "Amazing Grace:" "I once was lost, but now am found?"

One of the things about being found by Jesus is that it makes us feel so good that we want to share the experience with other people. Like Philip said to Nathanael, "Come and see." Jesus knew the power of those words; he had used them with two of John's disciples who were curious about him the day before the events of our Gospel text. (1:35-39.) It's like having a secret that's too good to keep to ourselves.

Now, that kind of encounter usually happens with someone we know, or who we like, right? Have you ever invited a stranger to "come and see" what Jesus is all about?

Sometimes, when I have suggested that members of a church take a little walking tour of their neighborhood or that of the church building and invite people to "come and see," I get the response that "Oh, I couldn't ask a stranger to come to church!" Why not, I ask? What's the worst that could happen? I imagine that they're going to say, "Well, the person might be bad and I'd be inviting them into the church." So... is that a problem? If they accept the invitation and show up, doesn't that mean that they're hungry for what God and Jesus can give them? Wouldn't that give them the opportunity to repent of their sins and be reassured of being their forgiven? They might even be moved to join the community in Christ.

But you know what, that's not what I usually hear. I hear that the person is afraid that someone might reject them or make fun of them for their faith. So my response again is, "So... is that a problem? Is your faith so weak that if a non-believer ridicules you for it, that you will be harmed? Couldn't you just shrug it off and go on to the next person? Remember what Jesus said about being ashamed of him? "Those who are ashamed of me and my words ... , of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father ..." (Mark 8:38.)

So what do you think would happen if we were to invite someone from the group of people who stormed the Capitol building last week to "come and see?" They might laugh at us. They might tell us that they have their own church – and that it's the "true" Christianity, not like whatever we call Christianity.

And it might also be a very dangerous move – the person we ask might be like Dylan Roof and come to a Bible study with a hidden shotgun and then shoot up the

other people present. But I think it's worth thinking about, because we **have** to find **some** way to reach across the divide between the people who voted for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris with the almost half of our nation who think that the democrat voters – engaged in a huge vote fraud to deprive their candidate of his rightful place.

I don't have answers, my friends, other than to follow Jesus' instructions for being a disciple. And even many of those activities are prohibited right now because of the pandemic. So what we're left with are the other discipleship activities, that I'm afraid aren't very popular: reading and studying scripture regularly; praying and supporting the ministry with our income and our time. Only a handful of people attend Bible Conversations and the Prayer Circle. People are giving, but this year the funds needed to carry out our ministries have diminished. I know that some people have lost their jobs and become unable to give at the same level they used to. Remember what Jesus said about how we use our treasure: "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also. (Matthew 6:21.)

We have young Samuel as our role model, saying "Here I am!" when God called him. Maybe the problem is that when I ask church people to participate in activities, they don't hear that as God calling them. It's certainly true that I am NOT God. I have no delusions of grandeur about that. But it is my best assessment of my life and my spirit that God has called me to this ministry, so when I ask people to be engaged in the various activities that make up the church's ministry, I do it as part of my call. If I'm wrong about my call, it would be good for you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, to tell me that you think that I need to go on to do something else. That would be practicing the discipline of spiritual friendship to a sibling in Christ.

In the meantime, let's pray for guidance about how to go about creating peace in our country. Dear Lord, you became incarnate to show us how to live in this world that you created. You walked with us and you chose a number of very human people to follow the path that you walked. Even when you called them to learn from you, you were aware that your time as a human being living on earth was limited. But you carried out your ministry faithfully. You healed people who were sick or impaired; you brought peace to people who were troubled in their minds. You taught us how to live in love with our fellow human creatures, and how to co-exist with the rest of creation. We find ourselves now on a path that has been dangerous to the healthy continuation of creation. Our country is in a state that

seems close to civil war. There is little cooperation between the nations of the world. We ask that you speak to each of us as you did to Samuel. And when you have a task for us to undertake that is as unpalatable as Samuel's task was, give us the courage you gave him to carry out what you would have us do. All this we pray in Jesus' name.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.      C: Amen