

“What have we found?” John 1:43-51

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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today we have for our meditation the account of the calling of some of Jesus’ first disciples – Phillip and Nathanael – as John has recorded it for us. I guess from time to time we may wonder, as least I do, almost every time when I am working on the next sermon – how do these ancient texts relate to us?

Those people lived millennia ago, thousands of miles away, in very different cultures, they spoke very different languages... and still, every Sunday we hear the stories and events from their lives. How do they relate to us?

See, time and geography and culture may have changed, but there are things that don’t change. The true God is still our Creator and Redeemer, we are still His creatures, whom He longs to welcome into His family.

As humanity we have accumulated wealth of information and knowledge, but in our essence, in our hearts, we are still the same little and rebellious creatures, in dire need to be rescued from our self-centredness and brought to the place, or should we say – into the relationships, where all our longings and hopes will find their ultimate fulfilment.

The way our God relates to us hasn’t change. He still speaks to us in His Word, He still sends His Spirit to dwell in us, He still sends His people with His own life-giving message trying to bring all His scattered and lost children home.

So, under the surface, nothing has change, and therefore the lessons that we can learn from the Word and the wisdom that is offered to us is as relevant to us today in 21st century Australia as it was to 1st century Roman citizen, or 7th century Chinese family, or 12th century Africans, or anyone else.

Now, what can we learn from our today’s Gospel reading? I suggest we look briefly at three things. First, to our commonalities with the situation that John

describes. Second, to our differences. And, third, what shall we do about them. Commonalities, differences, and what shall we do about them.

First, commonalities. We all have been found. We read that Jesus went and found Phillip and called Him: “Follow me!” And Phillip turned around and said to Nathanael: “I have found Jesus!” That’s funny... That’s how people even today say: “We have found Jesus,” even if it was Jesus who found them.

But seriously, we can relate to what Phillip said: “We have found someone really special!” What was it for them? “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

It meant that they had found someone for whom they have been waiting for fifteen hundred years. That’s huge, however, at that moment neither Phillip nor Andrew nor Peter nor Nathanael had no idea whom exactly they have found. Or, more precisely, who had found them.

Phillip said that they had found Him of whom the Old Testament foretold. That was true, but for them it will take a few more years and Jesus’ death and resurrection before they fully realize who that person is. We are in so much better position; we are so blessed. For we know who has found us.

We know exactly who Jesus is. Even as we too struggle to comprehend and understand it fully. The Word who was in the beginning, who was with God and who was God. Through Him everything is created that there is, in Him everything is still held together.

This Word became flesh as He came into this world looking for us. God Himself, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Holy One, the Eternal One, the Almighty has come searching for us.

And not just searching for us, He came to reveal the depth of His love and commitment and His future hopes for us, He came to offer His life in exchange to ours, He came to remove every obstacle that stood between us and the source of all goodness, the Triune God.

Just look at the world around us! There are so many of us. Billions! Whom would you choose as your companions for eternity? There are many great candidates! Some people are incredibly smart and gifted.

Some are wonderfully creative, others are powerful and influential, successful, accomplished, famous, funny, beautiful, strong, and so on. There are so many that really stand out with their brilliance.

He has chosen us. He has chosen you. He, the Eternal Son, has come and has picked you. He wants you. And you know, when He is done restoring and rebuilding us in His own image and likeness, we will be like Him, indescribably glorious and attractive. It’s coming... Just hold on...

Now about differences. Here we can observe strange disproportion. The first disciples new a little about who Jesus truly was. They could sense the divine greatness in His presence, but they didn't know even a little part of what we know today. Our knowledge about Jesus so much supersedes theirs. But now, let's look at how they reacted when they met or even heard about Jesus.

When John the Baptist pointed his disciples to Jesus, they followed Him, and as soon as they had experienced a few moments with Jesus, they couldn't keep to themselves, what they had discovered.

Andrew run to tell it to Simon Peter, John to proclaim it to his brother, and the same happened with Phillip. He just couldn't keep it to himself. "Nathanael, listen, just listen what we have found! We have found Him of whom Moses and all the prophets had prophesised! Come, you have to see Him! Come!"

We can witness this beautiful, innocent, pure joy of these first disciples. They were overjoyed, bubbling in their excitement: "Listen, come, you have to see Him!" And they didn't even know who this Jesus was... yet.

What about Christians today? What about us? Is that how we feel thinking about Him, who has found us, who has called us and has sent His Spirit to dwell in us? How often are we so uplifted that we can't keep silent and need to proclaim the Good News to others: "Come, you have to see Him!"

But even greater in the difference between those to whom the disciples told about Jesus and between those whom we may try to reach today. They were God fearing people. They had strong faith in God Yahweh and they were waiting on Him to provide from them the promised Messiah.

Even if Nathanael was initially suspicious, he was curious and hopeful that, perhaps, God may have fulfilled His promises. And you would know what reactions we can get from those whom we try to invite to come to Jesus.

What are people today interested in? What could actually stir up their interest enough to make them respond and come? What do you need to tell someone so that they would become curious enough to explore it?

I suspect the answer is embarrassingly sad. What would stir the interest of our contemporaries? "Come and see, we have found great deals and sales online!" "Come and see, we have found a new website where you can watch movies and listen music for free!"

Or perhaps: "We have discovered this great new social network!" Or maybe: "Come and see, there is this new spirituality, you can practice it whenever you want, and it will make you happy and successful! It will take your anxiety away, maybe will help you to lose some weight or maybe make you richer or taller!"

Jesus, the Son of God, the eternal Word, the divine Wisdom, the answer to all our deepest longings... who needs something like that! Who cares! That is true – we live among spiritually dead people with stone hearts and deaf ears.

At the same time, they can arrogantly think that they have got it. “Don’t bother me with your religion!” In many ways our situation is much different, much harder than that where Jesus’ first disciples walked.

Therefore, our third topic. Where from here? In many ways our situation is different, but if we are able to see under the surface, it is not that different. We all are created by the same Great Designer, and He has built in all of us, in all human beings the same deep longing, the same essential needs.

This is where there is room for us to learn. What are these needs? We all want to be someone, our lives to matter and to have significance, we want to be loved, appreciated and valued, we want to live meaningful and purposeful life, to be a part of something greater than ourselves, to live with peace of mind and rejoice in our daily lives, and to have some beautiful hope to look forward to.

In this respect we all are the same. Phillip and Nathanael. Each one of us. All the people whom the Father has placed in our lives. This applies to all. To us it has been revealed where to find the fulfillment of all these longing.

In the wonderful divine fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. When He find us and we don’t resist, He tunes our hearts to harmoniously desire the same that He desires for us and then our heartfelt desires are fulfilled, partly in this life, and fully and abundantly in the age to come.

If someone doesn’t know Jesus, they will keep searching and chasing their entire life for something that cannot be found in this world. They will look for it wherever they can, they will hope to find it, but when the end of their life closes in, they will be as far from their hoped destination as when they set out.

We shall pray that our Lord would equip us with His wisdom and would give us Spirit-powered words that can penetrate the hardest of hearts, so that we can be mouthpieces of Jesus and would be able to witness:

“Come, what you have always been looking for is here. And He has been looking and waiting for you. His name is Jesus. Come and meet Him!” May we see it happening with those who have special places in our hearts!

Finally, one more comment. What did Phillip do? What did Andrew and Peter, and John and James and Nathanael do when Jesus said: “Follow me!” Did you noticed how they asked Jesus: “But what is there for us?”

You didn’t. Because they didn’t ask. The very privilege to follow Jesus and to be with Him is the supreme gain that anyone can hope for. What did they do? Yes, they followed. Jesus changed everything in their lives. He became the centre of their new life. He became their new life. Everlasting life.

This is important! If we think that God the Father and Jesus deserve only a slice of our lives, we need to be clear – that is not following Jesus, and then there is no wonder that we can't experience this divine and overwhelming joy.

For then we essentially have kept our old lives, and plugged Jesus in as one more source of comfort and peace, as one more useful resource. It doesn't work. When Jesus says: "Follow me!" He expects us to give ourselves to Him.

With all who we are and all we have. Only then He is able to give us a new life where He, the source of true life and everything good is our Master, and where we daily walk with Him and live for Him.

I pray that the Holy Spirit would push us, that He would help us to let our old lives go, and would lead us in the joyful dance with the Trinity. May He grant that we too can experience the same joy that the first disciples of Jesus had, so that we too are ready to follow our Master wherever He leads us.

For He leads us where we truly belong. He leads us to the Father's home. Then we will not only see "heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man", but we will be with our God, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, we will see Him as He is, and He will dwell with us forever.

For He has found you.

Amen.