

2009, 1-18 See for yourself John 1:41-53(Epiphany 2)

Have you ever tried a product or purchased an item because someone has recommended it to you? Have you ever gone to a restaurant recommended by a friend? Have you ever rented a movie because someone else said they thought you'd enjoy it or because they said it was fantastic?

Are you more likely to try something recommended by someone you know or by a stranger (or worse, a salesperson!)? Normally we are more likely to follow the recommendation from someone we know and trust, right? I mean, really, when it comes down to it, do you trust salespeople and telemarketers?

After meeting Jesus and turning to follow him, Philip goes and gets Nathanael. Our story doesn't tell us that they were brothers or what relationship they had, but we can probably be fairly sure that they were at least friends – the narrative indicates that Philip sought Nathanael out to introduce him to Jesus. Nathanael is initially hesitant, even scornful of Jesus because of where he is from.

Nathanael has good reason to be skeptical of Jesus. Nathanael knows the Bible well. He is solid spiritual person. He understands the prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament. Jesus doesn't sound like anything special. Jesus from Nazareth? There are no prophecies about Nazareth. Nathanael probably assumes the Messiah will come from Bethlehem or maybe even Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Nathanael has some prejudice toward Nazereth. Nathanael thinks he knows exactly what he is looking for, but he is wrong. Nathanael comes to Jesus because of his friend Philip's advice. But Nathanael knows that even good friends occasionally give bad advice. "Oh yah, Philip remember the last time you told me to try that Mexican

Restaurant, or the time you recommended that certain genre of movie, or when you told me to buy that certain brand.”

Nathanael has probably gotten burnt before, deceived by salesman, fooled by teachers, and even hurt by friends. Nathanael may have heard about others proclaiming to have the answers in life. Nathanael may have tried drugs, tried power, tried fame, but all of these left him unfulfilled. He never found what he was looking for.

Jesus has time and room for skeptics and doubters. We tend to act like having questions or doubts is a sign of weakness. It can be, but not always. Let’s face it, if we are honest, we all have doubts. If we didn’t we would be so gullible that we would be an easy target for every snake oil salesman that came down the pike. Followers of Jesus are not called to have blind faith that believes anything. We are called to be tender hearted and tough minded. The Bible tells us to “not believe every spirit, but to test the spirits” (1 Jn 4:1). 1 Thess 5:21 says, “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” To do otherwise causes us to be, what the Bible calls, “infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Eph 4:14).

Jesus never scolds anyone for questions or honest doubts. He welcomes the opportunity. He can reassure any doubt honestly held. He is not afraid of any question. He is the truth; he holds the truth; and welcomes all who seek the truth.

There are many tire-kickers, who visit churches; they see and hear, and even once in a while they are moved by the words and experience, but they never intend to buy, then never intend to get fully developed in their relationship with God. They are never sold on God.

But eventually Nathanael does accept Philip's invitation. As he comes to Jesus he is amazed what he sees. He sees a man who knows where he is. He sees someone who knows what he is searching for. When Nathanael was under the fig tree he was likely studying the Bible, trying to find out who God was. Nathanael looked for God and sought him there as he meditated. And Jesus knew Nathanael well. Jesus knew right where he was and what Nathanael was looking for. Finally Nathanael does accept Jesus because of who Jesus is, not because his friend Philip, whom he trusts, has invited him.

Of course, out of all the people in our story, Jesus is the one who is ultimately passing out the invitations. Jesus is the one who invites us to consider who he is (and therefore who God is). For this is why the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" – to make God known! Jesus reveals God's love in his death and resurrection. He reveals a God who gives to each person the opportunity for salvation.

In the very act of confessing Jesus, we are also calling others to consider confessing Jesus. Our lives, our testimony, are an invitation to consider this same Jesus who has touched our lives and changed our hearts: "This is what the Lord has been doing in my life lately." "This is how God has provided for our needs this month." Sometimes this invitation has to be given directly: "Why don't you come to church this Sunday with me?" "Would you like to come to this Bible study?" "Hey, there's a great youth program at our church for your kids. Do you think they'd be interested?" When we testify to the work of God in our lives, we are inviting others to accept this same Jesus, to consider him, and to confess him.

We are not all called to be evangelistic superstars. There is only one Billy Graham. There was only one Paul the apostle. That I think is how God wants it. God

spreads the good news of Jesus primarily through ordinary people through ordinary circumstances. It's when we talk to our neighbors or when we have family over for supper or we drive our friends' kids to the basketball game. God's means of working doesn't usually appear supernatural in any obvious sense – He chooses to work salvation into our lives through the ordinariness of our lives. This means that each of us can participate in what God is doing and that our witness to Jesus, our confession of him as Son of God, does not have to be perfect. It just has to be honest, and heartfelt, and real.

The fact is that people are more likely to consider Jesus if they hear about Jesus from someone they already know and trust. This means that the people you have the best chance of introducing to Jesus are those who know you and trust you, whether family member, friend, or neighbor. Evangelism is best when it happens through relationships that are already there. These days people are less likely to accept Jesus in the context of a large Billy Graham style crusade than they are through friendships and close relationships.

Jesus asks John's disciples, "What are you looking for?" He asks each one of us this same question. Whether we realize it or not, each of us is looking for something. Every person on the planet is created by God to need Him, to be in relationship with Him. It's more true to say that whether we realize it or not, each of us is looking for someone, a specific Someone; that is, God. And Jesus is the one who can show us who God is, because "God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart . . . has made him known." This is what the Gospel of John is about: making God known through Jesus Christ the Son of God. If you already know Jesus as the Son of God, you are still invited to follow him, to follow him down deeper paths of discipleship, obedience, and faith. We can

always learn more. We will never know Jesus completely. Our relationship with him never reaches a point of perfection when we can say, “Well, that’s about as far as I can go!” If you know Jesus but want to know him more, this invitation is still for you. The invitation may be to a Bible Study or to a retreat or to watch a Christian video. These things that talk about Jesus will cause you to confess Jesus even more like Nathanael did when he said to Jesus, “You are the Son of God, You are the king of Israel.”

But if you’re sitting here today and wondering who this Jesus is and you’ve never been sold on the idea to follow him, I hope and pray that you will consider making that buying into Christianity today. Jesus invites you to follow him. He invites you to get to know him. Eventually Jesus wants you to confess him as Lord and Son of God. But it all starts with an initial response to what he says to those disciples: “Come and see.”