

Wesley United Methodist Church

January 18, 2015

"The Man with the Two Umbrellas."

John 1:43-51

I like the story of the young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received a letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: a study of the application form reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel that it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

In our text for this morning, Phillip comes to Nathanael and proclaims that he has found the one whom Moses wrote about. He is Jesus of Nazareth. While we do not know what expression Nathanael had on his face when he responded, I think that it is safe to say that his expression revealed a cynical sneer. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Answered Phillip: "Come and see."

You see, the church has the same problem. The church is full of those sure of themselves. We may even get to the point where we believe very little that we are told. We sit back under the fig tree with the sneer of a Nathanael and we ask, "Can anything good come from Wesley?" People come in and out the doors of this church with a critical eye. Skepticism is not a modern virtue. Doubting Thomases have been around since the dawn of time. By nature we don't want to be led. We want to lead. But, in the church, it is imperative that we have followers. In fact, it is imperative for all of us to be followers.

Nathanael learned this. He was skeptical at first but he was transformed. He became a follower because Phillip invited him.

Let me ask you: What was it that Phillip saw in Christ that moved him to follow, that stirred him so to invite his friend Nathanael. Come and see what? What did Phillip see in Jesus of Nazareth? I want to attempt to answer that question this morning. Come and see what?

First, Phillip asked Nathanael to come and see the redeemed. The day before Andrew followed Jesus and invited Peter. Then Phillip invited Nathanael. There were eight others who would become Jesus' inner circle, 12 in all. This was just the beginning. Soon there was 70, the Scriptures tell us, that comprised an outer circle. The net of redemption that was cast was large even in those early days. Hundreds were soon following, by the end of the century half a million. The church's work is not yet done. The church's work is exploding.

It was Andrew who made the first invitation to his brother and Phillip who made the second to a friend. They were watching as people began to place their lives in the hands of this carpenter. They listened as Jesus spoke to people in a way that made them understand their lives better than they understood themselves. They had seen souls redeemed just as they had seen their own redeemed. So when Phillip asked Nathanael to come and see he knew Jesus would redeem Nathanael as well. Come and see, he said, just come and see, that's all I ask you.

I know that every Christian here believes that God can redeem a soul. I know you believe that. So I ask you from this moment on to live like Phillip. Go out and ask someone to come and see. Invite to Bible study, invite them to Sunday school, invite them to worship service, invite them to a church activity.

I like the story of the two robins sitting in a tree. "I am really hungry," said the first one. "Me too," said the second one. "Let's fly down and find some lunch." They flew to the ground and found a nice plot of plowed ground full of worms. They ate and ate and ate and ate 'til they could eat no more.

"I'm so full I don't think I can fly back up to the tree," said the one. "Me either," said the other. "Let's just lay here and bask in the warm sun." "O.K.," said the one. They plopped down, basking in the sun. No sooner had they fallen asleep that a big fat cat snug up and gobbled them up. As he sat washing his face after his meal, he thought, "I love baskin' robins."

Will we be people who have eaten so much of God's good food that we sit and bask? Or, will we invite others? Will we go out of our way to say to people, "Come and see." That's all I ask, just come and see and you will learn that something good can come from Nazareth!

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if each one, at least once a month, invited another human being to "Come and See? Wouldn't it be wonderful if "Come and See" became a natural part of our life and relationships?

Second, Phillip had his moment. A moment with Jesus that transformed him. A moment where joy flooded into his world and made him want to go out and speak to someone. He found Nathanael. But you can understand Nathanael's skepticism. Look what Phillip is asking him to believe. He tells him, "I have found the one that Moses wrote about in the Law, and the one the Prophets foretold." It sounds a little to fantastic for Nathanael. You almost can't fault Nathanael. Jesus doesn't. He recognizes his doubt and helps him along. And now Nathanael is transformed. "I saw you while you were under the fig tree before Phillip called you," Jesus says.

Now Jesus has his attention. Nathanael is shaking in his sandals. "Rabbi," he says, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." But that wasn't to be the only moment. There were more to come. Jesus said, "You believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree. You're going to see greater things than that." Jesus was saying Come and see Nathanael. That's all I ask, just come and see, and you will learn that something good can come from Nazareth!

And that's the third thing. Phillip asked Nathanael to come and see. Come and see the heavens opened. Come and see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Those are the words of Jesus to Nathanael and as he and the other eleven disciples spent the next three years living and ministering with their Master, they saw the heavens open. When Jesus was baptized they saw the heavens open. When Jesus was transfigured they saw the heavens opened. When he fed the 5000 and the 4000 they saw the heavens opened and the food was plentiful. When Lazarus was raised from the grave they saw the heavens open and bring life to a dead man's bones. When Jesus died the heavens closed and grew silent. But the stone...the stone...the heavens opened and the stone was rolled away. When Jesus stood before the disciples behind that locked door they saw the heavens open and the Lord redeemed that day. Redeemed you and redeemed me. And he will redeem all those we invite to come and see.

Now, let me close with the story of the man with two umbrellas. Dr. Gordon Targerson, a Baptist pastor was crossing the Atlantic by ship some years ago. He noticed on several occasions a dark-skinned man sitting in a deck chair reading a Bible. One day Dr. Targerson sat down beside him and said, "Forgive my curiosity. I'm a Baptist minister. I notice you are a faithful Bible reader. I'd like to meet you." After the introductions, the dark-skinned man said, "I am Filipino. I was born into a good Catholic home. I went to the United States as a young man to study in one of your fine universities intending to become a lawyer. On my first day on campus, a student dropped by to visit. He welcomed me and offered to help in any way he could. Then he asked me where I went to church. I told him I was Catholic. He explained that the Catholic Church was quite a distance away, but he sat down and drew me a map. I thanked him and he left.

On the following Sunday morning it was raining. I decided to just skip church. But then there was a knock on my door. There stood my new friend and he was holding two umbrellas. He said that he worried that I might not be able to read his map. So, he said he would escort me to the Catholic church. I hurriedly dressed, thinking all the while what an unusual thoughtful person he was. I wondered what church he belonged to.

"As we walked along I asked him about his church. He said that his church was just around the corner. So, I suggested that we go to his church this Sunday, and then to mine the following Sunday. He agreed. But somehow I felt so much at home in his church that I never got around finding mine. After four years I felt that God was leading me into the ordained ministry rather than into law. I went to Drew University Seminary and was ordained a Methodist minister. Then I returned to the Philippines to serve in a Methodist parish. My name is Bishop Valencius, Bishop of the Methodist Church in the Philippines."

The hero of that story is not the Bishop, important though he is. The hero is that anonymous young man with two umbrellas. Whether they ended up at the Methodist or Catholic churches doesn't really matter. Go all the way back to the beginning of Christian history and you'll always find him. He is behind almost every Christian convert...that unnamed man or woman with two umbrellas...that person with a winsome faith who builds a bridge of friendship with another person. And across that bridge walks the Lord and claims another

eternal soul. You can be that person with two umbrellas. You can be like Phillip. Come and see that's all I ask, just come and see, and you will learn that something good can come from Nazareth! Amen.