

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶ “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” ⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

⁵⁰ Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” ⁵¹ He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

In the name of Jesus Christ, the world’s Savior, dear friends,

All of our lives, no matter our age, we find ourselves needing to follow the lead of others. Kids follow the ways of their parents. As they get older, they follow what their friends are doing. We follow the instruction of teachers along the way and we must follow the course set by our bosses too. If you’re in a position to invest some money for retirement, more often than not, you’ll need the direction of someone else so that you get it right. There are all sorts of people whom we follow though life.

It is much more comfortable and reassuring when you can trust the one whose lead you are following. It’s great when your mom and your dad are trustworthy people. It’s nice when you can trust your teacher to truly help you learn. It’s much better at work when you can at least trust that your boss isn’t out to get you. And it’s good advice to never hand over your investment money to a person you just don’t trust. How vital it is to be able to trust those whose lead you follow.

I’m sure you would agree, this is all even more important when it comes to spiritual things. Because if you mistakenly follow a crooked financial advisor, you might lose your house and end up sleeping on a park bench, but if you follow the lead of the wrong person when it comes to God, you’ll lose your heavenly home!

This morning, in his Holy Word, Jesus is calling you to follow him. And it is important for us to know that you can

TRUST THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU TO FOLLOW!

1. WHO IS JESUS THAT I SHOULD TRUST HIM?

2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW HIM?

Two weeks ago, we celebrated Epiphany, the Gentiles’ Christmas, the wise men making their way to the young Jesus and bowing before him and reminding us that the Father sent his one and only Son to be the Savior of all people of this world. Last Sunday we looked in on John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River and heard the Father’s voice proclaiming that Jesus was his beloved Son, the One who would save all people from their sins. And now today the words recorded by John in his

gospel take us to the time, just after his baptism, when Jesus was first calling his disciples, or “followers.” Just as we have for the last couple weeks, we again have an Epiphany message revealing Jesus as the Savior.

Today I am urging you to TRUST THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU TO FOLLOW! But a natural question for anyone is: “WHO IS JESUS IS THAT I SHOULD TRUST HIM?” The Holy Spirit-inspired words written down by John tell us just who Jesus is that we should trust him. We read about two men who were waiting to see the Messiah God had promised to send. One of these men, Philip, appears to believe right away that Jesus was his Savior; the other, Nathanael, seems like the more skeptical type, but he too, proclaims his faith in Jesus as both brothers trusted and followed the Savior.

As I said, Jesus had just been baptized by John. Now he would begin his earthly ministry. Now he would publicly preach and teach about God and salvation through faith in him. He would do miracles which revealed him to be true God. And at the end of his public ministry, he would lay down his life and do away with stranglehold that sin, death and the devil had over people. As he began to publicly proclaim salvation through him, he gathered a dozen men to follow him closely. They would travel with him, listen to him speak, witness the miracles, and see the greatest act of love the world has ever known as their Lord willingly went to the cross. And they would see the glory of Easter morning as Jesus rose from the grave proving his victory over death. They would receive from Jesus the command to go and tell the world about the love of God and salvation by faith in him.

Today we hear about Philip. What we hear is simply this: **The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”** The way Jesus really said it was *“Follow me and keep on following me.”* And Philip did! And this was not just Philip saying, *“Okay”* and tagging along behind this Jesus to see what would happen—as if Philip had nothing better to do. No. This was an invitation to believe in Jesus. Philip knew who this was and he believed. And he helps us to know who this Jesus is that we also should trust him. Philip finds his brother, Nathanael, and he says, **“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”**

Philip knew that this was the Messiah told about in the Old Testament Scriptures! That’s what he meant when he said that Moses and the Prophets wrote about him. This was the Savior whose coming into the world was foretold by God in numerous places in the Scriptures that they knew so well! This was true God come down from heaven! But in the same breath, Philip reminds us of Jesus’ human nature too. He is the Jesus who was from the town of Nazareth and Joseph was his dad. Can you imagine—true God and true man, the long-awaited Savior standing right in front of your eyes and inviting you to follow him! It was an amazing and unforgettable day for Philip.

His brother was a different story. Nathanael, who was also called Bartholomew, had some doubts. Maybe not doubting-Thomas kind of doubts, but at least some questions.

When his brother found him and told him who he had found, his brother said, **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”** I wonder if he was sneering when he said it. Or maybe he was laughing at the thought of it. How could the Messiah come from a little Galilean village which was certainly not any better than his own town of Bethsaida in Galilee? He may not have even had to wrack his brains to think of a prophecy that said the Messiah would come from Nazareth because he knew there wasn't one. Despite his brother's enthusiasm, this seemed doubtful. But he went with his brother anyway. And in the Savior's meeting with Nathanael we witness other things which tell us who Jesus is that we should trust in him.

Maybe you've had an experience where you walk up to someone—maybe at a party—and the person already knows who you are. The obvious response is to ask *“Have we met?”* or *“How do you know me?”* That's pretty much what happened with Nathanael. He didn't know how Jesus knew him. How did Jesus know to say of Nathanael **“Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”** It's interesting to know that Nathanael must have been an honest or very straightforward kind of guy. But it's more interesting and important to know that Jesus is the One who knows things that seem impossible to know. And he is the One who can see things in places where he isn't. His answer to Nathanael was **“I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”** True God. Jesus is true God—that's how he can know a person he has never met and know who he is and where he is even before his brother goes to get him.

Jesus' words caused Nathanael's doubts to dissolve. And in his response to Jesus, we again find out who Jesus is that we should trust in him. Nathanael runs together three titles in one sentence when he realizes that Jesus is not just a rabbi (or teacher), but THE Rabbi, the Son of God, the King of Israel! His honest and faith-filled response to Jesus helps us to see Jesus as the Savior too.

Finally, Jesus himself shows us that we can trust him by revealing that he is the One who can make promises about the future and know without question that they will happen. He made such a promise to Nathanael: **Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”**

It will always be that some people will doubt that Jesus is the only Savior and some will reject him. Nathanael doubted but came to believe. Those who plotted against Jesus and eventually put him to death are among those who flat out rejected him as their Savior, just as many do today. None of that is the fault of Jesus, who revealed himself to be the promised Savior of all people. The fault is with the individual sinners both then and now who refuse the call of the Holy Spirit who wants every person to trust in Jesus. How thankful we can be that the Holy Spirit overcame our sinful doubt and rejection of Jesus and has given us faith to believe. Jesus has shown who he is and by the grace of God, we trust in him.

But what does it mean to follow him? Is that the same thing as trusting him? Look at what happened with two of Jesus' first followers—or disciples. Philip listened to the single command of Jesus: "Follow me." He immediately went and found his brother Nathanael. They both believed that the promises of the prophets were fulfilled in Jesus. They recognized Jesus as God's Son and the King who would lead his people. They saw greater things like Jesus talked about. They saw him bloodied and battered and hanging on the cross for them. They saw the risen Christ appear in their locked room. They saw the Savior disappear into the clouds after he told them to go into all the world and share the gospel. They saw the angels who told them that Jesus would return again just as they saw him go into heaven.

These things, along with others too many to mention, changed their lives. They followed him, meaning, they listened to what he told them and they lived it. They trusted his word. They were the missionaries Christ commanded them to be. History tells us that all but Judas, who betrayed Jesus and John who died of old age went to their deaths as a result of proclaiming the glorious gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. And they did indeed follow Jesus into heaven at the end of their earthly lives.

Just like Philip and Nathanael, **YOU CAN TRUST THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU TO FOLLOW HIM.** And following Jesus today looks just like the following those first disciples did. His command to them is his command to us: **If you love me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15).** His invitation to them, encouraging them to continue trusting in him, is the same one he gives to us: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me (John 14:1).** He told them to spread the good news with the same words spoken to us: **Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).** To those who were his witnesses then and to those who are his witnesses now he extends the same comfort: **In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:2-3).**

Yes, following and trusting are the same. When Jesus extends to you the gracious invitation **"Follow me"** he wants you to trust him wholeheartedly and to run excitedly to those you know—just as Philip did—so that they too may know their Savior. In the same way as those men, he wants you to spread the gospel to all people. He wants you to praise him as Nathanael did. He wants you to be faithful to the end because he so dearly wants to bestow on you the crown of life earned by him for you. May the Holy Spirit of God work in your heart as he did in Philip and Nathanael so that you forever **TRUST THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU TO FOLLOW.** Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.