

## "How Do You Know My Name?"

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John 1:43-51

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### Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

<sup>44</sup> Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. <sup>45</sup> 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."

<sup>46</sup> "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

<sup>48</sup> "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

<sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

<sup>50</sup> Jesus said, "You believe<sup>▫</sup> because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." <sup>51</sup> He then added, "Very truly I tell you, <sup>▫</sup> you<sup>▫</sup> will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'<sup>▫</sup> the Son of Man."

## I. WHERE DO WE LIVE OUR LIVES?

The next day.....

Jesus went out and found a variety of people, in a number of places, going about their lives in a variety of ways.

Some were in the middle of their lives, doing their daily work, relating with their families, circulating in the community. Others were kind of circling *around* their lives—not very centered. Not sure who they were and what they were looking for.

Richard Rohr pines, in "Everything Belongs," that we "are a *circumference people*, with little access to the center. We live on the boundaries of our own lives...too quickly claiming the superficial as substance. These boundaries and edges are not "bad" as much as they are "passing, accidental, sometimes illusory."

I wonder, where would we place ourselves? Are we living In the Center—from the heart, where Christ resides? Or, more on the circumference? In something like a spinning circle.

My cats have a favorite toy—you've probably seen it, that's a big round circle, with a scratching platform in the center, with a tunnel around it where a ball spins. Endlessly.

It's called by numerous names: "Scratch & Roll Spinning Cat Toy;" "Crazy Circle" "Cat mental and physical exerciser—providing endless chasing and spinning in circles!" You get the idea!

When I imagine about “living on the circumference of our lives,” this comes immediately to mind!

How much time (and energy!) do *we* spend—running around in circles, chasing something we can’t catch, skimming the surface or perimeter of life, rather than digging in, grounding ourselves, and collecting our energies and goals in a centered place and space?

## **II. JESUS IS CALLING—Wherever We Are**

Where do we find ourselves *today*? Life for all of us has not gotten any easier, or more clear, or more centered in recent days.

At least I have not felt that, as I look around at the tumult that swirls, and I would guess that we all struggle to “live from the Center,” at least on many days.

We might start, in asking that question, by asking if it’s really an *either/or* question at all! Dualistic thinking is so easy to fall into! When life gets hard, is God *only* in the Center, *if* we can find our way to it? Or, is God *also* out there on the edge, hanging with us in the midst of our endless striving, chasing the elusive ball in circles, and thinking THIS time we will surely catch it and win the game?!

In the midst of this pondering, Jesus calls to us from lakeshore. Calls us from that circumference-living and crazy-making pursuit of meaningful purpose, to a different reality. Calls us from the shore to the middle of the lake. From the rim of the Baptismal Font to the

sweet spot in the middle of the bowl. To putting more than a toe in the water. To stepping-in with our whole selves, moving toward the Center—even walking on the water itself if we’re brave. To live from *our* True Center.

## **III. MORE TO THE STORY**

Let’s go back to that story. John’s telling is a little different from the other gospel writers’. In fact, every “calling of the disciples” story has its own setting, names, order of how things were done.

(If your curiosity is peaked by these peculiarities in our scriptures, do a little digging into “call of disciples stories” and see what you find! Report back—we’d love to learn along with you.)

Our story today has this funny little quirk of the calling of Nathanael—not in the other gospels. Jesus calls him by name, even though he didn’t know him ahead of time! When asked, Jesus tells that he “saw him under the fig tree” and knew he was a good guy!

Scholars say they’re not sure what this “bit” is about, and if there’s a message to be found here. But they do encourage us to play with it. Have some creative fun and explore what it *might* mean.

That got me to wondering about *all* of this story, and what’s behind it? What’s the **Rest of the Story?** The “story behind the story” that didn’t get recorded by the Gospel writers?

For instance: Did Jesus only call twelve disciples, and they all signed-on right away? Maybe we've only heard about the ones who said "Yes!"

"Many are called, but few are chosen," Jesus said later. I wonder if he was referring to *this* moment in ministry?

And, maybe Jesus was *frustrated* when he said that. That he had cast out a line; tossed out an exploratory net to dozens more. And only ONE dozen "took the bait!" Answered the call. Joined-in, and became part of the ministry.

Even though many were invited, maybe only 12 were willing to take the *risk*. Were open to putting more than a toe in the water and following him with their whole selves, leaving their previous lives behind.

And, speaking of that, leaving their previous lives only happened to some, it would seem! The ones who were fishers, didn't totally give up *their* previous lives—some disciples seemed to keep fishing to feed the gang and maybe even their families.

That's a good question for a whole 'nother day. (I think I'll do some homework on that and get back to you.) We know the fishers in the Group of Twelve didn't totally give up their day jobs *while* following Jesus. Did Judas give up being a Zealot, or Matthew give up being a Tax Collector? Who all quit their day jobs? The Gospels don't tell us for sure, and, as we've said, they certainly don't all agree on these stories!)

#### **IV. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?**

The most important thing to wonder about, in all this, is the "so what?" What does saying "Yes!" to Jesus' call mean? In real time. Real life. Whether Jesus calls you by name, while alone, or in a group? Whether or not you leave your day job to follow.

We are called to a new path. To seeing the world and our lives through new lenses. To asking new questions and considering new answers and ways of being in the world.

For centuries, people of the Christian faith have used a core question when making difficult decisions of many kinds. **"What Would Jesus Do?"**

It may seem that this simple phrase is becoming too much of a cliché—after all, it's imprinted on wrist bands and coffee cups and bumper stickers and untold merchandise. It might feel a little *trite* in our time. But it was originally suggested by an author theologian in the 1800's *long* before the commercialization, and I think it deserves a central place in our thinking and faith journey—again in these times. We can reclaim it as bedrock faith.

"What Would Jesus Do" comes into our decisions—public and private—made every day and every hour, and it did for those first disciples, too! They got to live and walk and breathe with Jesus, so didn't have to have a sticker on the front of their boats or the letters embroidered on the brim of their ball caps!

But when they said Yes! that day, or over many days and years; when they dropped their nets or whatever they were doing or using to make a living; when they turned *aside* from other movements or saviors they were following or looking to for answers, and put their faith and trust in Jesus, they *made* a statement. Not unlike wearing a banner or sporting a boat sticker.

They declared that they were forsaking all others—all news channels and theories of belief; jumping into Jesus' boat, walking down His Path. Turning, changing direction, opting for a new, life-giving path. This was a Big Decision, and they made it not just once, but many times over.

Lots of others, very likely, did NOT say yes. Even Jesus probably didn't get a 100% response rate to his Invitation. High rates of return on a survey are pretty rare—*whatever* your era! Even if you're the Messiah!

We should note that Jesus DID experience a pretty good *retention* rate! Except for some significant denying and betraying along the way by a few, his band who didn't really know what they were getting into that day at the shore, from an amazingly diverse bunch of backgrounds and walks of life, did hang together in miraculous ways—long after Jesus was no longer in their physical presence.

I think a key to this was how Jesus responded to the denying and betraying. He did not kick them off the island or fire them as disciples. He met them heart to

heart, even in his sorrow and dismay; forgave them and asked them to reconsider their path.

## **V. JESUS IS CALLING—US—TODAY**

The call is the same. From Jesus Christ to those first disciples, to us, today, right now. In Baptism Reaffirmation that we observed last week, and in today's Call to the Disciples, we rededicate our very lives to the Core Identity we were given even before birth: Beloved Child of God, Follower of Christ.

We recommit ourselves to live out of *that* identity and purpose, first and foremost—no matter what label, role, or name the world tries to impose upon us. No matter how the labels and categories might change around us and be used by others differently than our own understanding.

So, in the today's Step on the Journey of Faith, we decide to answer Yea or Nay to Jesus' call on our lives. To follow as disciples, into whatever this next year and chapter bring. Leaving behind the trappings that were not productive, meaningful, or live-giving or neighbor-loving.

Deciding to follow Jesus—truly and completely—means asking ourselves in every decision and alliance, debate or challenge—What would Jesus Do?

This can't be a made-up, culturally-affected image of Jesus, either, but the Jesus we learn about in the Gospels and other holy writing; in our own experiences and hearts.

When the world is portraying and following a fake Christ—one that supports tyranny and hate and violence, it is incumbent upon anyone who claims to follow, to be a Disciple, to go back to the Bible and see what he really said and taught and stood for. If it's confusing, due to the context of place and time, and the differing overlays of the gospel writers, then dig in!

Study with scholars and one another. Wrestle with the texts and teachings, as we do in sermons and Sunday School, in faithful community. Find out what Jesus *really* stood for and wanted for us to know and experience, and how he sought for us all to be healed and reconciled with God and one another. See how he called us to see with new eyes—the eyes of our hearts. To know in our bones how to love God, our neighbors and ourselves.

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.  
Open the eyes of my heart!  
I want to **see** YOU!*

## **VII. CALLED BY NAME TO THE CENTER**

Jesus *saw* Nathanael sitting under a fig tree. He *recognized* him “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

A disciple with potential. Jesus had a sweet spot moment of recognizing, truly seeing the soul of another.

Nathanael had a sweet spot moment of recognizing Jesus for who *he* was—“surely sent from God!”

Where does God find *us*? Living out of the Center of our lives, or spinning around the circumference?

How does God know *our* name?

By our answer to this question: **Will you follow?** Will you come and see, live and walk as a Disciple? Seek to land in the footsteps, walk in the healing, the compassionate, merciful Way of Jesus?

Will you intentionally choose a *different* path—one that may diverge often from the wide path that many choose or would have us to believe is The Way? That worldly way that asks: “What’s in it for me?” “How do I find success?” “How can I take care of my own?” “I don’t want to be disturbed by the tumult and the suffering of the world!”

Those callings that swirl around us are very different from Jesus’ calling.

Jesus calls us to find the Sweet Spot—the Center of our lives—that is our calling as Children of God—to live in God’s presence and awareness in every moment. What will our answer be? Amen.