

Sunday January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
2nd Sunday after Epiphany

**PRAYER:** O Lord, your word is rare in these days; visions are so infrequent. Wickedness is wrapped around our ears. Indifference is caked upon our eyes.

So, speak to us through our children, God. They will be able to hear you, for when a thundercloud rumbles, they know the voice is yours. Appear to us through our children, God. They will be able to see you, for when tears flow freely, they know the tears to be yours. Come to us through your children, God, and we shall not be able to keep from asking, “What was that God told you?”

Then we shall unstop our ears and open our eyes. Then we will know that you are the Lord.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION:** O Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy upon us as we make our confession. We grow lax in our discipline, and we disobey Christ. Our faith is flabby when put to the test; our courage vanishes in the face of temptation. Our joints stiffen when we are called to act. We profess loyalty, when our bodies deny commitment. Have mercy upon us and forgive our sin.

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE:** Hear Paul’s words when he writes: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have found from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price.” Christ mercifully paid the price for our sin. Through him we may approach God with our temples made clean. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP:** God nourishes us by the outpouring of his love. God strengthens us with his life-giving Spirit. Our bodies are sustained by His goodness and power. God is the source of every good act we perform and of every talent we possess. These gifts we now offer are but a portion of the abundance poured out upon us by God’s gracious and generous hand. May God accept them and he has already accepted us.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** O God of Hannah, mother of Samuel and woman of God, who so longed for a child that she could no longer pray in words, receive our prayer. Grant us peace. For like Hannah, we have been barren. We have hoped. We have laboured. We have expected. We have trusted. But our hopes have faded, our labours have been lost, our expectations have fallen, our trust has been broken. Yes, Lord, we know Hannah well. Send us the peace that came to her, even before her discovery that she was with child.

O God of Eli, father of rebellious sons and priest of a rebellious people, who so longed for a word from the Lord that he would listen even to a word from a child, receive our prayer. Grant us your light. For like Eli, we have been unseeing. We have wandered about in darkness of our own making. We have stumbled upon the bricks and stones of our own laying. We have been terrified of strange sounds and retreated to our own beds. Yes, Lord, we know Eli well. Send us the presence that came to him through the words of the child of Hannah.

O God of Samuel, son of a barren woman and servant of the Lord, who so longed for the sight of you that he slept beside your lamp in the temple, receive our prayer. Grant us clarity of vision. For like Samuel, we are confused. Voices shout, whisper, grumble at us from all sides.

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At the shouting we tremble, at the whispering we shiver, at the grumbling we shrink. Which voice is yours? Which one, ours? Which one, theirs? Which voice do we follow, which one should we ignore? Yes, Lord, we know Samuel well. Send us the clear vision that came to him through the guidance of his blind friend Eli.

O God of Philip, man of Galilee, who so longed-for Israel's deliverance that he rushed to tell Nathanael of the Messiah's arrival, receive our prayer. Grant us courage. For like Philip and his friends, we have been anxious. Who should be our leader? Many would rule us, many would teach us, and many would tempt us. But the ruler's domination concedes little freedom. The teachers' instruction yields little enlightenment. The tempters' persuasion offers little satisfaction. Yes, Lord, we know Philip well. Send us the courage that came to him when he found where Christ was abiding.

O God, we are not our own. Our hearts are yours; fulfill them. Our hearts are yours; inspire them. Our hearts are yours; empower them. Transform them into your temples, and we will listen for your voice.

**BENEDICTION:** Someday soon we will be standing by the side of the road when someone walks by. And behold, we will recognize in that person the presence of Christ. When we are asked to "come and see" where Christ is staying, let us go. Let us not hesitate, for there we are needed; let us not hesitate, for we too have need. Let us make haste to the God who dwells with our neighbour, and together we will discover what was once hidden.

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1 Samuel 3:1-10 and John 1:43-51  
“Come and See!”

I am sure that most of us have, from time to time, run into the word *paradox*. The probability increases when I suggest that you have probably heard the adjective *paradoxical*; as in “that was a paradoxical statement”. The definition of a paradox goes something like this, “A paradox is a statement, which though true, seems false and self-contradictory.”

Every field of study, and human endeavor, has within its culture and literature, paradoxes. If you Google the word paradox, and especially check out Wikipedia, you will be amazed at the list of paradoxes. Some paradoxes are very common such as, “What came first, the chicken or the egg?” Others are more perplexing, and are the problems that keep philosophers and academics up at night.

Some paradoxes have been around for thousands of years, such as the “The Ship of Theseus”. In this paradox, you begin to replace a ship one piece at a time, but no matter how many pieces of the ship you replace, you always consider it to be the same ship. Consider that you replace every single part over time, but you still consider it the same ship. Now take the replaced parts and reassemble them, and do you now have a new ship or the old ship, which already exists.

There is also the “Value Paradox” that asks why it is that water is so essential for our survival, but diamonds are worth considerably more? Paradoxes are the kind of thing one of my favourite characters on the old Canadian Air Farce show used to consider. Ron Ferguson used to come out, and do a monologue entitled “the Confused Philosopher”. And, boy, was he ever confused, asking all kinds of weird questions.

Some of Ferguson’s examples were, “Why is that we park in drive ways and drive on parkways?” “When you open a new bag of cotton balls do you have to throw the first one away?” “Is there anything, such as Military Intelligence? Is it possible to have just one trouser or one scissor instead of a pair?” “What colour does a Smurf turn when it can’t breathe?” “Why is it still a building after it is finished, shouldn’t it be a built?” “When ancient man ate chicken for the very first time, what did they say it tasted like?” “What do you tell a duck when you want it to lower its head?”

Indeed, he was a confused philosopher, and maybe he was confused because he lacked the most essential aspect of any philosopher. He lacked community. The Confused Philosopher always appeared alone, but all other great philosophers, or teachers throughout history, had a group of students, or disciples that: followed them, learned from, and interacted with them.

In fact, the Greek word *didaskolos* which we translate as “teacher” does not apply to anyone unless there is also one or more *mathetes*, or disciples. In Jesus’ day, and for hundreds of years before Jesus, and after him, there were *didaskolos*, or teachers, and with every teacher there were always pupils or disciples.

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The Greek people, in particular, were really into this teacher/pupil thing. Although we have writings of several great teachers, we can surmise that there were hundreds more Greek philosophers, who left no writings, but always sought out a little group of disciples.

This little band of followers was always attracted to the main idea of the philosopher. The disciples chose to follow, because they had some affinity with the teacher, and wished to explore in greater detail the ins and outs of the philosopher's ideas. The Greeks were fascinated by the world in which they lived. Over centuries, they made detailed observations of what they saw, and speculated on the meaning of what they saw.

The Apostle Paul ran into this in Acts 17 when he went to Athens, and there we read that he debated Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who thought he was a babbler. They even dragged Paul off to the Council of Philosophers to explain this new religion he was talking about. Philosophy, and the debate of philosophy, was so ingrained in Athenian society, that men would spend all their days sitting around in the city market place talking about all kinds of things. Sounds like a trip to the local Tim Hortons.

In Greek philosophy, and indeed most schools of philosophy, whenever a new idea arose, there might also come along a new teacher, and a new group of disciples to embrace and promote that idea. For example: one of the paradoxical ideas that some Greek philosophers believed, was that you could not step into the same river twice. It seems like a confused idea, but actually there was some serious logic behind it. They believed this for two reasons.

First, the river is moving, so the river you stepped into before, is already downstream and second, people are always changing, so you are never the same person twice. Everything is therefore changing and no two: moments, places, or people, are ever the same. The Greeks also were into geometry and architecture. Who among us hasn't been schooled in the Pythagorean Theorem that states that the square and the hypotenuse of a right-angle triangle equals the sum of the squares of the two sides? Well guess what, Pythagoras had a little school of disciples.

The Greeks were not alone in their thirst for knowledge, because the Jews also had teachers and disciples. There were those who prided themselves on being a disciple of Moses. These devoted followers of Moses believed that Moses had received from God the law, and that their lives should be lived on the principles of that law. They also wanted the people to know these important precepts, so they too gathered disciples around them.

There was a group in Jesus' day we are quite familiar with, called Pharisees. They took the following of Moses even further, by concerning themselves with the Talmud and Mishnah. They were greatly afraid that people would unwittingly break the law, so to protect people from transgressions of the law they came up with 250 new laws and 350 prohibitions. And they also gathered people together and taught them these new commandments and people identified with them and became their disciples.

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Now I want to point out to you that the Greeks built a relationship with their disciples based on philosophy, the disciples of Moses based it on principle, and the Pharisees based it on procedure. Into this mix of ideas and relationship models, comes something radically different. You see; John the Baptist had disciples too. John looked around at the way things were, and didn't like what he saw, and so he started a protest movement.

He was a wild man, living outside the establishment. His disciples were attracted to him, because John was against something; so, John's relationship with his disciples was based on protest. As you can see, there are several ways of relating to our teacher as disciples. The only thing all these groups had in common was they all had a leader, and they all had disciples who responded to the leader's teaching.

Now into all these models of discipleship, comes Jesus, and he does something quite different from all the rest, even John. Jesus invites everyone, and anyone, to become his disciples. The relationship though is not based on: philosophy, or principle, or procedure and not even on protest. Jesus makes a very, very, simple invitation to people, and it is this, "Come unto me."

He goes to simple, hardworking fishermen mending their nets, a tax collector counting his money, and simply says, "Follow me." In the Gospel of Mark, as we read over the passage where Jesus is choosing his disciples, Mark makes a very beautiful observation that we might overlook if we are not careful in our reading. Mark tells us that Jesus selected his disciples, so that they might be "*with him*".

Maybe you are starting to see the profound difference between other teachers and Jesus. In the "Jesus Movement", if I can use that phrase, disciples were invited into a relationship with a person, not just what the person: taught, or believed, or protested. This is a critical thing for us to understand, especially in light of our Gospel lesson today. It is quite common today for people to talk about Christian philosophy, because they believe there is a great deal of truth in the Christian faith.

Perhaps people have looked at other philosophies, and have come to the conclusion that what Jesus taught is the best of the bunch. But that is as far as they go. Others may push a bit further in saying that we need to clearly define what it means to follow Christian philosophy, and so they turn to the historic church as a source of details for understanding the truth Jesus taught.

So, people state with some warmth, that they are Protestant or Catholic or even Baptist, communicating their particular slant on Christ's teaching. Still others go further, and say that we must also know what we must do, and what we cannot do as Christ's followers. So, they are very careful about laying out before us their convictions about Christian procedures. Then there are still others who talk about following Jesus by protesting something.

Maybe they are protesting poverty, war, social policies of governments or something else. Their lives seem defined by what they are against in the name of Christ.

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There is nothing wrong with some, or all of these approaches, but if that is as far as we go, there is something missing. And all of us know someone, so obsessed with the one aspect of discipleship they consider critical, that they leave us cold.

There is an odd thing occurs in many self-professed followers of Jesus. They talk about Jesus, and then seem to hold within them unresolved anger, or seem devoid of any kind of grace to those who don't follow their strict code of discipleship. What can frighten us is that there is a real danger of knowing a great deal about Jesus, and thinking we know what he wants us to do, but we have no real relationship with him.

This is the situation that developed in Corinth that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 10-17. The young church was arguing amongst itself and there was no harmony. A good part of the dissension was based on the misplaced loyalties of members of the community. Paul writes, *"Some of you are saying, 'I am a follower of Paul.' Others are saying, 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Peter,' or 'I follow only Christ.' Can Christ be divided into pieces?"* Being a follower of Christ isn't about philosophy, procedures, principles or even protests.

Christian discipleship is unique, because it invites us to know Jesus, not just his teaching. This is especially important to recognize in our modern world with the power of technology and mass media. It is so easy to get trapped into a misplaced loyalty to a popular preacher or teacher, at the expense of knowing Christ. We can become so captured by the attraction of a teacher's method, and message, that we fail to test it by Christ's truth, or by other teachers.

Notice our gospel lesson today. Phillip meets Jesus, and is invited to be a disciple. His first action as a disciple is to go and find Nathaniel. Phillip is very excited about his encounter with Jesus, and says to Nathaniel, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth."

Nathaniel responded with his famous remark, "Nazareth! Can any good come from there?" Now this is a critical moment for Nathaniel, and you can see the hand of God in it. Phillip could have hunkered down, and begin to argue the merits of following Jesus. He could have thrown all kinds of information at Nathaniel. If he were alive today, Phillip could have produced a tract, or a book of apologetics, to convince Nathaniel.

Instead, what does Phillip do? He says simply, "Just come and see for yourself". Come and meet Jesus, and see if a relationship with him is what your soul longs for. Maybe Nazareth was a backwater kind of place, but Phillip thought he found something of great value. He had found the *pearl of great price*, or the *treasure hidden in a field* which was worth everything he owned; to borrow the metaphor from the parables.

I ran across an interesting story that the Associated Press carried on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004. *The slum district of Manila is already overcrowded, but a gold rush has made it worse. It all started when 15-year-old Alfredo Gallo, who was combing the riverbed that runs through the Philippine capital, found a chunk of gold.*

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*His father immediately sold the nugget for about \$500 and bought a television and a bicycle. Once word got out, hundreds of people flocked to the banks of the filthy river looking for the precious metal. Though the river is filthy and strewn with garbage, many people see it with new eyes. One village chief commented, "It is a puzzle. All we got from this before was trash."*

Nathaniel could not believe anything good could ever come from Nazareth, but he soon discovered that the very best treasure of all came from this little village. And that treasure was not: a philosophy to apply to life, or a principle to follow, or a procedure to make one happier, or more acceptable to God, or a protest to commit one's energy to. That precious treasure, more valuable than all you possess, is Jesus. I wonder; have you found that treasure for yourself?