

Sermon for Sunday, January 4, 2026

John 1:35-51

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

For the last three years we have been reading the story of Jesus from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There are many similarities between these gospels and hearing them as we have over the last three years means that we have gotten used to the way these authors tell the story of Jesus and the way they describe the call story of the first disciples. The author of the gospel of John tells the story of Jesus and the call story of those first disciples in a completely unique way.

Today's Scripture reading describes the different ways that people become followers of Jesus. Each follower has a word or phrase that they use to define who they believe Jesus to be. Let's begin by looking at the ways people become followers and then we will look at their tags or labels for Jesus.

The first example of a way that a person becomes a follower occurs when John the witness (John the Baptizer) points at Jesus and reiterates, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" Now John had said the same thing the day before to his followers and it appears that no one immediately turned to follow Jesus. But when he reiterates this statement the next day, two of his disciples, who had apparently thought about their teacher's words overnight, decided that they should investigate further by following Jesus and listening to what he had to say. *Sometimes we need to someone, like a teacher, to point us in the right direction. And we need to think about what our teacher is saying for a while and not rush to judgement or rush to make a change.*

Now one of these two followers of John the witness was a man named Andrew. Andrew had a brother named Simon and Andrew went and found Simon and brought him to Jesus. There are two details to notice: first there is no mention that Simon is a fisherman. (Yes, we will find it out at the very end of the gospel in chapter 21....but not here.) As John tells it Jesus immediately gives Simon the nickname Peter (meaning rock.) All of the gospels call Simon, Simon Peter, but the details included in the different gospels vary. John thinks it important to include this detail.

We know that Simon Peter is an important leader among the disciples: all of the gospels attest to that. But he is brought into the circle of disciples by the invitation of his brother Andrew. Andrew's lure for getting his brother to come and see Jesus was his claim, "Look we have found the Messiah—the anointed one." This is a very significant claim. Jews had been waiting for the arrival of the Messiah for hundreds of years. Andrew's announcement is momentous. It could be a significant moment in the history of Israel and it makes sense that Simon would want to check out this claim. (Historically it is well known that there were many people claiming the title of Messiah in those days. That being the case it's easy to imagine that Simon would want to make his own decision on this important matter.) *Sometimes becoming a follower of Jesus occurs because of an invitation. In this case the invitation came from a close family member so we assume that Simon Peter trusted Andrew's word enough to make the effort to check it out.*

In this text there are multiple entry points for people to become followers/disciples of Jesus. I have talked about two: Your teacher points you in this direction. Your brother or a family member extends an invitation for you to come and see. In verse 43 we learn about a third way: Jesus directly invites Philip, who as it turns out, comes from the same community as Andrew and Simon Peter. (All three of these men were from a small town and it's safe to assume that everybody knows everybody.)

Something about Jesus caused Philip to go and find Nathanael; Nathanael is the skeptic. It helps to have a skeptic in this story because a skeptic will ask the questions aloud that we might be afraid to ask. Nathanael is the one who says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Let's not gloss over Nathanael's statement. Jesus seems to realize that he has to interact with Nathanael in order to convince him to follow. As a result Jesus has a conversation with him and this conversation is a little hard to decipher. Did Jesus, as God's son know the heart and mind of Nathanael before coming face-to-face with him? Perhaps and of course we like to believe that Jesus knew him well because, well because Jesus is God and God knows everything about us.

Or was Jesus simply a perceptive observer of people. Did he hang out in the neighborhood, ask questions and learn about people, the way a curious new neighbor freshly moved into Vasa might do? We don't know. But however it worked, the conversation between

Jesus and Nathanael clearly made a difference to Nathanael and he becomes a follower.

This gospel passage demonstrates the several methods by which people became followers/disciples of Jesus.

So what might we learn from today's reading?. Why did the author of the gospel include these details? One reason is to emphasize that there is no right or wrong way to become a follower of Jesus. One does not need a direct interaction with Jesus to become a follower. Of the four disciples mentioned, three of them were invited by other people....not by Jesus himself. Notice also that not one of the people extending the invitations made long complicated arguments defending their belief that Jesus was important. The statements made are one sentence long, open-ended invitations allowing the person invited to draw their own conclusion.

The second reason why the author included these stories is because each of the persons issuing an invitation made a claim about Jesus' identity. These claims included:

- He is the Lamb of God by John the witness
- He is the Messiah (anointed one) by Andrew, Simon's brother
- He is the one that Moses and other prophets spoke of—he is the fulfillment of OT prophecies by Philip
- He is Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth by Nathanael
- He is the Son of God and King of Israel by Nathanael

The most important reason for this passage is that each of these men made a different claim about Jesus' identity. All of them are accurate but none of them as individual claims completely describe Jesus. (It's kind of like being given a multiple choice question in a test. Who is Jesus? He is all of the above: lamb of God, messiah, spoken of by the prophets, son of God and king of Israel. Want to know who Jesus is? Listen to the witnesses' descriptions in these few verses and then, like those men 2000 years ago, come and see for yourself. Amen.