

There is a story of a 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 this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel 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 response revealed a cynical sneer. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" And Phillip answered: "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 of what we are told. We sit back under the fig tree with the sneer of Nathanael and we ask, "Can anything good come from Immanuel?, Can anything good come from our Youth Group; can anything good come from WELCA or Altar Guild or the men's fellowship?." 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 there are 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. He became a follower of Jesus because of a simple invitation.

Let me ask you: What was it that Phillip saw in Christ that moved him to follow, that caused him to invite his friend Nathanael. What did Phillip see in Jesus of Nazareth? What do we see in Jesus of Nazareth?

First off, we know the whole story. We know that Jesus came to redeem souls. As we talk about redeeming souls, we are talking about how Jesus bought us back from slavery, slavery to sin. Every single one of us is a sinner, somebody who turned their back on God to pursue our own selfish desires. In fact, we are all slaves to sins that we cannot free ourselves from.

You see, our souls had a pretty steep price on them because Jesus had to pay with his life. Only the Son of God could help us by dying on a cross. Only the Messiah could overcome death and rise again to grant eternal life to all.

It is because of Christ's activity in history that our lives have been transformed. We no longer have to live in fear because of hopelessness, we have hope for all time because Christ died for each one of us and offers us forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Instead of living in sin and despair with no hope of crossing the gap that separates us from God, we are brought into God's presence through Christ Jesus.

Christ has opened God's kingdom for each one of us and invited us in for eternity. The only thing we must do is believe in the promises that God offers through Christ's death and resurrection: the promises of forgiveness and salvation. God calls all of us to be with HIM. In our gospel, Jesus was calling his disciples and he is also calling us. He is calling us to follow him.

As we live out our faith, we respond to God's love by following Christ. Our leader is Christ, and we are the ones who follow, the ones who listen to what he has to teach us and then attempt to live our lives according to our faith. Now here is the tricky part. We follow where Christ leads us, but we go in different directions. We are still being led, and our final destination is the same, but our journey can be very different.

God is calling us to be his disciples in this world. Listen for HIS invitation in your life and follow. The world is full of leaders but none are better than Christ Jesus. The world also has its share of followers but none are more powerful than those who follow Christ.