

SERMON 011418

“The Cost of Discipleship”  
John 1:43-51

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On this second Sunday after Epiphany we find Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Having been baptized by John, he is now ready to call those individuals who will walk with him for most of his ministry. Here he is, recruiting his disciples. He wants to gather a group of followers or students to share in his mission. These individuals will be expected to listen to his teachings, understand his ways, ask questions, live in obedience to his teachings, and carry on his mission when he is gone. We know that, at times, Jesus had many followers, but, sometimes due to difficult teachings, many fell away, and all he had were the twelve. These were the ones he personally called and chose to be with him, those with whom he shared his most important teachings.

As our Scripture opens, Philip has already made the decision to follow Jesus. He then tells his friend Nathanael that Jesus might be the one everyone has been waiting for. Nathanael is skeptical, “Jesus of Nazareth? Can any good thing come from Nazareth?” he says, but he is willing to go with Philip to check him out.

When Jesus sees Nathanael, he welcomes him warmly: “Here’s a true Israelite! There’s no deception about him.” Nathanael is stunned. How could it be that Jesus knows him, or knows anything about him? Just as the wise men recognized and praised Jesus as soon as they saw him, this familiarity that Jesus shows to Nathanael causes him to have his own Epiphany: “Rabbi! You are the King of Israel!” To which Jesus replies: “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”—or something like that.

We really don’t know very much more about Nathanael. We do know that he followed Jesus to the end—being mentioned as one of the disciples to whom Jesus appeared near the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection. His name is not mentioned in Matthew, Mark or Luke, but he is believed to be called Bartholomew in those Gospels.

Jesus knows each of us long before we know him, and welcomes us just as we are, skeptical or suspicious, with an invitation to come and see, and to journey with him. Can you imagine what it might be like for someone in our community to know us that well?

During a trial, in a small Missouri town, the local prosecuting attorney called his first witness to the stand. The witness was a proper well-dressed elderly lady, a retired teacher, well spoken, and poised. With her hand on the Bible, she was sworn in, “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help her God.” “I do—absolutely,” was her answer.

The prosecuting attorney approached the woman and asked, “Mrs. Jones, do you know me?” She responded, “Why, yes I do know you, Mr. Williams. I’ve known you since you were a young boy and frankly, you’ve been a big disappointment to me. You lie, cheat on your wife, manipulate people and talk badly about them behind their backs. You think you’re a rising big

shot when you haven't the sense to realize you never will amount to anything more than a two-bit paper-pushing shyster. Yes, I know you quite well."

The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?"

She again replied, "Why, yes, I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. He's lazy, bigoted, has a bad drinking problem. The man can't build or keep a normal relationship with anyone and his law practice is one of the worst in the entire state. Not to mention he cheated on his wife with three different women. Yes, I know him."

The defense attorney almost fainted. Laughter mixed with gasps, thundered throughout the courtroom and the audience was on the verge of chaos.

At this point, the judge brought the courtroom to silence, called both counselors to the bench, and said, in a very quiet voice, "If either of you jokers asks her if she knows me, you're going to jail."

Thank goodness Jesus focuses on the good in us—on the potential we have for being true disciples. So, Jesus called his disciples, just ordinary people doing ordinary things. He called those with a willingness to come and see, to open their eyes to new possibilities. In the same way, Jesus invites us, to meet the one who already knows us very well, and has a place in his kingdom, just waiting for us.

Today we will be installing Lynne, Caroline and Earl as active members of the Session, and we can be very confident that Jesus has known them and loved them from the very first moment of their existence. Jesus knows all of the potential within them, much more thoroughly than even their families know about them. And Jesus has a wonderful future in store for them. As they were growing up, their families and the church played the role of Philip for them: to introduce them to Jesus, to help them learn from him, and to become involved in doing his work in the world. But now, upon their installation, they will move into the role of being Philip for others—by showing others what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the way that they serve as leaders for the church.

Being a disciple of Christ is more than being a Christian. The most important role we can play as disciples is to let people see how Jesus has made a difference to us. We need to show that we aren't just part-time Christians. We need to show that by our baptism we have entered into a lasting covenant to follow Jesus, and to be obedient to his teachings in everything we do. If we're serious about being his disciples, then it should be evident in our lives—how we relate to other people, what causes we support, how we spend our money, what's important enough to get us out of bed in the morning.

Through Scripture and through the lives of Christians we respect, we can learn quite a bit about things Jesus might do if he were in the situations we face. The more time we commit to spending in his company—through Scripture reading, prayer and meditation—the more his

ways will become our ways. You can be certain that others do watch us, and they are wondering if any good thing can come from Historic Franklin Presbyterian Church.

The invitation to 'come and see' is part of a key theme in John's Gospel—light versus darkness, sight versus blindness, faith versus unbelief. Jesus is the Light of the World, and Jesus has come to be the light so that we might see. Jesus can only do what he has seen his Father do. Jesus reveals his identity by performing signs. Some believe in Jesus when they see the signs, but others refuse to believe, choosing, instead, to remain in the darkness. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. See that God has been revealed to us in the Word made Flesh. Even the man born blind recognizes Jesus, and testifies that it was Jesus who cured him – while the enemies of Jesus, with their perfectly good eyesight, and perfectly closed minds, remain blind to the truth. "Come and see," John tells us, "not for idle curiosity, but to have life in all its abundance."

Today Lynne, Caroline and Earl will come before this congregation, and before God, to affirm their desire to serve in a leadership capacity for this congregation. May they, may all of us, not only come to serve Jesus, but come—to worship, to eat at his table, to share in the life and work of his church, and to live a life that honors his name and glorifies God. AMEN