

Sermon: Are you listening for the call?
St Columba's Virtual
17 January 2021

Sermon: **Are you listening for the call?**

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, Psalm 19:1-6 and John 1:43-51

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Listen for the call, the prompting, and the still small voice.

Share the call.

Expect more!

This is what we will be looking at this morning.

John's Gospel doesn't start with the genealogy of Jesus, or with his birth, it starts with John telling about John the Baptist near Bethany¹ at the Jordan River.

John was surrounded by many who had become his disciples - who came to be baptised by him, and to hear his teaching. Among these disciples were some of those who would be appointed to be among the 12 chosen by Jesus.

The teachings of John the Baptist had become known to the Jewish leaders, who became concerned. They had sent priests and Levites to find out who John was. When confronted John the Baptist stated that he was not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. He told them that one would come after him *"the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."*

Then in Chapter 1, verse 29 we read:

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

This by way of context.

¹ The site of this other Bethany is not known, except that it was located on the east side of the Jordan River. Footnote NIV study Bible, page 1591.

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Then we read about Andrew and Peter becoming followers of Christ², followed by Philip and Nathanael.

I want to start with Andrew.

Two of those who were with John the Baptist on that day were Andrew and another who is not named. They were among the many who had become followers of John the Baptist.

When John saw Jesus passing by, he said:

"Look, the Lamb of God!"

This was clearly within earshot of Andrew and the disciple with him.

The two of them began to follow Jesus. When Jesus became aware that they were following him he turns to ask them:

"What do you want?"

They answer this question with a question of their own:

"Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

Jesus responds:

"Come, and you will see."

The two follow Jesus and spend the day with him.

How I would love to know what they discussed but this is not recorded.

What we do read is that the first thing that Andrew did was to find his brother, Simon. Excitedly he tells Simon:

"We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

And then he takes Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at Simon and said:

"You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas".

² John 1: 35-42

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"Cephas" translated, is Peter³ meaning the rock.

You will note that there was no direct call from Jesus to Andrew and his companion. They heard the words of John saying *"Look, the Lamb of God!"* and this caused them to follow Jesus leading to the interaction I have just described.

What about Philip and Nathanael in our passage for this morning?

We read in verse 43 that on the following day Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee. Before he did so he found Philip and said to him:

*"Follow me."*⁴

No further interaction is recorded, but we do read that Philip went and found Nathanael and said to 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."

It's clear that Nathanael has little regard for this town and he responds:

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Philip doesn't argue with him but urges him to come and see.

Philip takes Nathanael to Jesus, and as Jesus saw them approaching he addresses Nathanael:

"Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

Nathanael is clearly taken aback and he immediately asks:

"How do you know me?"

Jesus replies:

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

Nathanael was full of doubt when Philip first told him that he had found the Messiah and doubted whether anyone so important could come from Nazareth.

³ *Cephas* (Aramaic) and *Peter* (Greek) both mean *rock*.

⁴ Recounted in Matthew 4:19.

Now, faced with the comments of Jesus stating that Jesus saw him as a true believer without guile, and that he had seen him standing under a fig tree when Philip called him, he is convinced and he does not hesitate.

He declares:

"Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

This passage then concludes with Jesus commenting on the faith of Nathanael based on the fact that Jesus had told him that he had been seen under the fig tree, but adding that Nathanael would see greater things than that. That he would see the heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

I want us first to compare John's description of the way in which Andrew and Simon, on the one hand, and Philip and Nathanael on the other hand, became followers of Jesus.

Andrew and the man with him began to follow Jesus, after John the Baptist had revealed Jesus to be the "Lamb of God." After spending time with Jesus, Andrew accepted that Jesus was the Messiah. He immediately set off to call his brother Simon and then he took Simon with him to Jesus. Jesus clearly knew who Simon was confirming that he was the son of John and informing Simon that he would be called Cephas – Peter – the rock⁵.

When we look at Philip and Nathanael, we see that after Jesus found Philip. He called on him to "Follow me." We saw how Philip went off to find Nathanael and brought him to Jesus. In the same way as Andrew had done, Philip tells Nathanael that "We have found Jesus". He wants Nathanael to meet Jesus and takes him to Jesus. Nathanael recognises Jesus as the Messiah and proclaims him to be the Son of God.

Both Andrew and Philip heard the call and reacted to it. They didn't just keep the revelation to themselves. They went off to find Peter and Nathanael and brought them to Jesus.

⁵ In the footnote in my Bible. It is noted that "Peter was anything but a rock; he was impulsive and unstable. In Acts, he was a pillar of the early church. Jesus named him, not for what he was. But for what, by God's grace, he would become. NIV Study Bible page 1592.

In both of these instances, it is clear that Jesus knew these four before he actually interacted with them. He had "seen" them before he had met them.

This appears from his statement to Simon that Simon was the son of John and also that he saw in Simon the potential that Simon would become the rock on which the church would be built.

It also appears from his interaction with Nathanael. I read that the Greek word for "saw" when Jesus **saw** Nathanael approaching... and when he said, "I **saw** you while you were still under the fig tree... " is a different one to the word used for seeing with your eyes.

When Philip said to Nathanael "Come and see" he wanted Nathanael to come and see Jesus with his own eyes.

When Jesus said he "saw" Nathanael the word indicates spiritual perception rather than physical sight.

A writer⁶ put it like this:

"... we read Jesus' words that, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you", which suggests that Jesus knew of Nathanael before this encounter - not in a physical sense of having seen him before - but in a more spiritual sense of having had his hand on Nathanael's life before that encounter from all eternity."

When Andrew called Simon, and Philip called Nathanael. They said, "We have found the Messiah". This was not in fact not true, because Jesus had his hand on them before they met him physically. He knew them before that time. They became followers of Jesus as they responded to the revelation that they were called.

Paul in writing his letters knew this. For example, we read in:

Ephesians 1:18

⁶ See article: [John 1:43-51 - The call to be a follower of Jesus \(standrewsenfield.com\)](https://standrewsenfield.com/John-1-43-51-The-call-to-be-a-follower-of-Jesus). For a detailed commentary on this passage go to the Intervarsity Press Commentary here: [Jesus Appears and His First Disciples Are Gathered \(1:35-51\) - The IVP New Testament Commentary Series - Bible Gateway](https://www.ivep.org.uk/Commentary/John-1-35-51-The-IVP-New-Testament-Commentary-Series-Bible-Gateway)

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18 "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,"

Romans 1:1, 6-7

1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:"

2 Thessalonians 2:14

14 "He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 9:15

15 "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—"

When I use the phrase "I have made a decision for Christ" it is correct in that I have made a decision, but the decision is a response to what has already been done for me. It is as result of a revelation by God.

This revelation may be made in different ways.

In the book of Samuel⁷ you will read of Samuel hearing a voice calling his name. He thinks that it is Eli and he goes through to Eli, but is told that Eli did not call him. This happens three times and Eli then explains to Samuel that he believes that it is the Lord calling Samuel. Samuel is instructed to respond with the words '*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*'

Samuel does this and he receives instructions from the Lord.

⁷ 1 Samuel chapter 3.

The call may come from a friend saying to you, "Come and see." Inviting you to hear the Word of God as this is shared in a service, a recorded sermon like this, a fellowship group or in a conversation.

The revelation will likely come from, or be fully revealed, as you consider the Scriptures.

The revelation may come through an appreciation of the wonders of nature.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage from Romans like this⁸:

"But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being."

David wrote this in Psalm 19:

"1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

3 They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.

4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

When last did you just pause and consider the wonders of nature.

The miracle of the little seed growing into a mighty tree.

The delicate beauty of flowers in spring.

The taste of delicious fresh fruit.

The morning chorus as the birds awake long before dawn.

The smell of rain and the power of a thunderstorm on the Highveld.

An act of random kindness from a stranger.

The call may come as a prompting or a still small voice.

⁸ Romans 1:18-20.

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Where did that thought come from?

Pause and consider this and answer that question.

So firstly, our passage this morning calls on you, and it calls on me, to ask the question":
"Am I listening for the call?

I believe it is every preacher's prayer that through the sharing of a message, a member, or members, of the congregation will hear the Word of God in a way that causes them to follow Jesus, or to renew their commitment to do so.

Secondly, we also need to learn from the reactions of Andrew and Philip. Jesus, having been revealed to them, they immediately set off to share the call.

We are to do the same. And we are not to be put off if some express doubts, like Nathanael did. We need not be experts in theology who need to do the persuading. What we need to do is to say, "Come and see."

Invite a friend to a service at St Columba's, or to have a cup of coffee with you and another believer where a conversation can be started.

Important as well is that we share the gospel by the way we live our own lives - with our deeds speaking louder than our words.

The third and last point is an important one. Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see greater things than the fact that Jesus saw him under the fig tree. He says:

"... you shall see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

This appears to be a reference to Jacob's dream recorded in Genesis.⁹ Jesus to be revealed as God's elect, through whom redemption comes to the world.

Jesus is saying greater revelations will be made to the disciples. They are to expect more.





⁹ Genesis 28:12. "12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

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The instruction to us is also clear in that as we continue throughout our lives here on this earth on our journey of faith, we are to expect more.

You are to expect further and greater revelations as you faithfully follow Jesus, as you gather in community to contemplate the Scriptures and reach an increasing, and better, understanding of God as your Father, Jesus as your saviour and the Holy Spirit as your counsellor.

The message this morning is that we are:

-  To listen for the call, the prompting, and the still small voice:
-  To share the call; and
-  To expect more!
-  Amen.

Gordon Hay

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