

Take the Call John 1:43-51

It's a common scenario. The phone rings, whether it's a cell phone or landline, and the first thing we do is look at the caller id. Who is it calling? Is it someone I know, or if so, is it someone I feel like talking to right now? Or even more frequently these days, a message or text pops up on the cell phone and we look at it and decide if we want to respond to it. Regardless of the format, we face that choice, answer or respond to it now, or ignore it and send it to voicemail for later. Our modern technology affords us multiple options to choose from in answering calls from other people. We can hit ignore on our cell phone and send it right to voicemail, and we can ignore other message formats as well.

But it hasn't always been this way. There was a time when the phone rang, you had no way of knowing who was on the other end. There was no caller id, no text messaging, just a phone ringing. That made the choice simpler but also required some bravery and fortitude on the part of the one picking up the phone. It could be anyone on the other end: a good friend; a favorite family member; a not so favorite family member; a salesman; a bill collector; the sky was the limit. Now for me, and I'm sure for many of you, we remember those days when answering the phone was stepping out in faith a little bit...dipping your toe a little into the unknown.

In our gospel story this morning, we take that communication even one further back to a time when most communication was done face to face. There was no real way to avoid the encounter with someone you'd maybe rather send to voicemail or respond to their text later...They were in your space, right in front of you. That's where Nathaniel found himself. Philip called on him and gave him the news in person that he had to meet this new guy in town.

That's a major difference between this story in John and the other gospels. In the other gospels, Jesus says follow me, and the disciples drop what they're doing and leave their

livelihoods solely on blind faith. But in John, there's more of an emphasis on the testimony of others. Earlier in this chapter (vs. 35-42), John the Baptist testifies to his disciples, Andrew and his friend the Beloved Disciple (John), that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Andrew then testifies to his brother Simon (who becomes Peter) about what he has seen and heard from Jesus. They weren't getting those cold calls without caller id. They had their own version of caller id - in the testimony of others before encountering Jesus.

Now Jesus has moved on to the hometown of Andrew and Peter, calls Philip, and now Philip is testifying to Nathaniel. But Nathaniel doesn't have much time to see who was calling to meet him face to face. He doesn't really have the time to get the details from Philip before he's face to face with Jesus, this man from Nazareth, a place where nothing "good" ever comes from. Even though he approaches this encounter largely as a cold call, he decides to accept it anyway.

Jesus proves to Nathaniel that he knows who he is, that he knows the secrets of his heart. He knows he is a righteous man and shows Nathaniel he has been keeping track of him all along. He saw him "under the fig tree" and promises him that he will see much more as his disciple, using the allusion of Jacob's dream of a ladder to heaven.

In John's gospel, Jesus makes clear right up front with his disciples who he is - the Son of Man...the ladder and connection between God's realm in heaven and the earthly realm. His disciples knew who they were following and chose to accept the call. What about us? Do we accept that call when it comes from Jesus?

Like the disciples, we have plenty of testimony about who Jesus is and what the promises of taking that call are. At some point in our lives, most of us answered that initial call in one form or another and were probably baptized or formally made a commitment to Christ. But does that call only come once? Or is Jesus more like your partner or best friend calling every day, multiple times per day? Do we have a chat going constantly with Jesus,

or do we hit ignore and send it to voicemail more than we answer. And what exactly does Jesus' caller id look like? Is it always the same? After all, Jesus can wear many faces. The face of the sick, the prisoner, the hungry, the stranger, the poor, and naked all are different faces of Jesus.

As our story points out today, Jesus came from Nazareth, that little backwater town that according to Nathaniel, "nothing good" ever comes from. I can't help but notice the similarity between that statement and statements we've heard in the public discourse of our own country in recent years. You remember how we've heard about the importance of building walls, of keeping those less "desirable" out and away from us...Do we heed the call of Jesus in the face of the Mexican, the Honduran, the Native American, the African? According to Matthew 25, whatever we do to the least of these, we do to Him.

Do we answer all the calls we get from Jesus? The call to daily discipleship, the call to help those who have less than we, the call from the stranger, the hungry and thirsty, the sick and the prisoner, the poor and the naked.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is someone I've been reflecting on a lot recently with the turn of events in our country and the world. If you're not familiar with him, he was a Lutheran pastor during Hitler's rise to power in Germany. As he saw the mainline churches in Germany colluding more and more with the Nazi regime, he felt compelled to start his own seminary and church, the Confessing Church, to try to stay true to the teachings of Christ in contrast to the compromised mainline churches. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he addresses this contradiction of being called by Christ, yet still viewing others as simply that, "others" ...as somehow different or less than ourselves. Bonhoeffer states, "Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating. By judging others, we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are." He goes on to say, "Every moment and every situation challenges us to action and to

obedience. We have literally no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbor or not. We must get into action and obey - we must behave like a neighbor to him" ... he concludes with, "Discipleship means adherence to Christ"

How much do we differentiate between people or peoples? Do we have different values for those who are brown or black, who look different than us, who worship in a different faith than us, whose lifestyle or culture is different than ours? In God's eyes and under the auspices of God's grace, can any human be lesser than another?...

So, what do we do? How do we answer Christ's call to "come and follow me?" Well, it's clear it involves action, not inaction. To follow Christ is to do all those things from Matthew 25, taking care of all those listed, including and especially the stranger. It's caring, it's showing compassion to those "others" that we are told we should fear. It's standing up for justice over discrimination and oppression. It's doing something. Doing nothing is not an option.

As we approach Martin Luther King Day tomorrow, let us remember his words as well, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." Like Philip and Andrew, we have the opportunity to testify to the living Christ through our actions...or not testify by inaction and apathy. Jesus is always calling, calling us to follow him, not just once, but every day of our lives. The question is, will we answer that call daily, or will we ignore it. The choice is ours and the many faces of Christ depend on that choice. What will you choose? Amen.