

### **John 1:43-51**

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

## **Calling and Finding** - January 17, 2021

*John 1:43-51*

Have you seen the animated Disney movie called, “Soul?” Right now, it’s only available on the Disney plus channel on cable, so if you’re not a subscriber, you’re out of luck for the time being. When I saw the previews and advertisements for it, I thought it was about music — and in a way it is. But it’s really about life, being lost in life and then finding new life. Soul is the story of a pianist named Joe Gardner. He’s a middle-aged music teacher living in New York City. He spends his days with middle-school kids, conducting the band and teaching them to play their instruments.

Joe feels frustrated. He is an enormously talented pianist and feels he ought to be playing full time in a band. Over and over again he auditions, gets lots of short term gigs, but never gets his big break. One day, a former student of his calls to tell him a well known jazz band is looking for a new piano player. Joe comes to the audition and lands the job. On his way home, he accidentally falls down a manhole, leaving him in a coma. While in the coma, Joe has an out-of-body experience which allows him to examine his life from a different point of view. He emerges from the coma and shows up to play with the band. His dream has come true.

But it hasn’t. Joe gives the performance of his life. He’s happy, the band is happy, and then he realizes that he will be expected to duplicate his performance every night going forward. Suddenly, Joe is dissatisfied again. He achieved what he thought was his dream, but having attained it, found it wasn’t all he thought it would be. However, having had the opportunity to look at himself differently, he realizes that being a middle-school music teacher could be far more challenging and fulfilling than spending his life playing the same music over and over again. Joe resolves to embrace a new way of looking at life — determined to appreciate each moment as it comes.

The author Angel Chernoff, on her website “Marc and Angel Hack Life” tells the story of another musician who, like Joe, lost his motivation and then got it back. Let me read it to you:

“I’m a struggling musician, and a bit of a loner based on my ongoing struggles with depression. I always thought my music career would take me farther than it has. After a local concert this evening, a teenage boy walked up to me, shook my hand and then hugged me. He said, ‘Thank you.’ ‘For what?’ I asked. ‘I’ve been really stressed out lately. Let’s just say I’m not one of the popular kids at school. But I have something I look forward to every day. When I get home from school, and no one is home, I put your two albums on shuffle and sing along as loud as I can,’ he said.”

I expect more than a few of us might find ourselves, or have found ourselves in similar situations. Well-meaning parents, friends, and teachers may urge us to make life choices not because the choices align

with what drives us inside or what we feel passionate about. No, they urge us to make our choices on the basis of what they think will make us safe, secure, and certain.

There are, no doubt, many with college degrees and higher, employed at steady jobs, who wonder why they are doing what they are doing. There are people in every occupation and vocation: from pastors to plumbers who do what they do simply because they are following in the footsteps of their parents. There are others who find themselves in relationships asking themselves why they chose to commit to that particular individual. Was it money? Was it security? Was it fear of having no other options?

What so many people have in common is the feeling that that shouldn't accept their present situation: work, or relationships, or other circumstances. Many people have persuaded themselves that there really is something else, someone else, another place, another situation, which will make them truly happy and satisfied.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that if we are dissatisfied, we should merely accept our place in life and make the most of it. Far from it. I'm sure some of you may be in truly terrible circumstances, jobs or relationships that are slowly destroying you day by day. For such people, it is wise, it is genuine self-caring to escape abusive, degrading situations and get away from them as fast as possible.

But that is not most people. Sometimes, most times, when we objectively look at what is going on in our lives, we may conclude that what we are doing right now, how we are living right now, or with whom we are living right now is actually not bad — in fact it's pretty good. What I'm saying is that for many of us, we might want to try accepting, even embracing our current calling in life so we will believe that we actually are in the right place. In other words, we need to sit down with ourselves, face to face, all alone, ask ourselves why. Why are we dissatisfied? Why do we think leaving our job, or our partner, or our home, or our family will make a difference? Will it really? Or will we find out, like our two musicians, that we are truly where we are supposed to be and instead of fleeing our present circumstances, we should embrace them and dedicate our lives to making the most of them. Perhaps, after thinking and praying about it, we will realize that our present lives are exactly what they should be. That the lives we have right now are exactly what God wants for us. That rather than resist our lives, we should accept them and even enjoy them.

On the other hand, change, sometimes radical change is the answer. Sometimes the solution is to escape, literally escape, our present situations, whether they are our jobs, our relationships, our families. Maybe the voice of God is indeed calling us to a new life and a new way of being.

Our scripture today tells us about two dissatisfied men: Philip and his friend Nathaniel. We don't know much about them except they were searching. They were dissatisfied. They needed a new purpose life. They were seeking change.

How do we know this? Because when Jesus asked Philip to follow him, Philip dropped everything and followed. Philip, in turn, told his friend Nathaniel about Jesus and invited him to follow and he did also. What is interesting about this story is the use of the word, “found.” The gospel says Jesus found Philip, Philip found Nathaniel, and Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Lord. This word “found” is very powerful because in order to be found, you first must be lost.

Jesus found Philip. Not “Jesus asked Philip.” Not “Jesus invited Philip.” Jesus found Philip. For reasons not explained, Philip considered himself to be lost. He was dissatisfied. He knew in his heart something had to change for him, particularly regarding how he understood his life and his relationship with God. How do we know? When Jesus called Philip, Philip responded immediately. Jesus knew Philip’s neediness and Philip sensed Jesus had the answers and fulfillment he so desperately needed. Thus when Jesus called, what else could Philip do but to follow? Philip knew that following Jesus would change his life and end his dissatisfaction. Jesus was his answer. Philip was truly found.

But here is the remarkable thing. Philip did not keep his transformation to himself. Suddenly Philip went from being dissatisfied to being fulfilled and having experienced fulfillment, he had to share his good news. So Philip told his friend Nathaniel, someone he knew who was also dissatisfied. Someone who was lost like he was. Moreover, he did not just tell Nathaniel, Philip went out and found Nathaniel. And Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah. Philip declared he was no longer lost. He was found. Moreover, Philip promised Nathaniel that he, too, was also found.

Clearly, Nathaniel experienced the same transformation Philip did because when he met Jesus in person, Nathaniel exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Needless to say, those are words people don’t speak very often. Nathaniel met Jesus and Jesus changed Nathaniel. He was lost, and then he was found.

I think that there is nothing new in the events in our nation these past few weeks. As shocking as the insurrection and subsequent fallout have been, they merely serve to underline the stark, sad reality which has ensnared our nation and our world since its creation. Nationally, globally, we are extremely dissatisfied. Regardless of our personal situations, we, humanity, collectively, are yearning for life to change. Oppression takes so many forms. Poverty takes so many forms, Isolation takes so many forms, feeling worthless takes so many forms, and I can go on. But what they all have in common is they feed a desire, a hunger, a ravenous, burning, craving that somehow life can be different. It’s got to be better than this! It has to be!

And in Jesus Philip and Nathaniel found their answer. They felt, they sensed, they grasped that Jesus Christ would fill the emptiness, fill the yearning, fill the hunger and Jesus would give them real purpose and real meaning in their lives — far more than any one or any thing had ever done before.

It doesn't matter where you fall on the political spectrum: from fascist to communist. We are dissatisfied and we want change.

The Christian message is simple and radical at the same time. Jesus Christ is the way, Jesus Christ is the truth, Jesus Christ is the life. When we admit we are lost, when we admit we need to be found, when we realize we are wasting our lives fighting a prolonged, useless battle for self-satisfaction that we can never win, then, then, then, Jesus Christ, who has been calling out to us every day, Jesus Christ will show us we are found. And after that realization, our lives will never be the same.

The problem with the world is that we have a hard time admitting we're lost, don't we? We all maintain a facade of self-assurance and self-confidence that projects an image to the world that everything is OK. We are taught from an early age to pretend that we're in control and all is well. Every school day when we greet our ten-year-olds and ask them "How are you?", every single one of them, every single day, all of them say, "fine." So of course we carry that lie into our lives as we grow up and we might even believe it sometimes.

But the yearning never stops. The desire never stops. The dissatisfaction keeps on coming. We need, desperately to be found.

When the day comes that we can finally drop our guard. When the day comes that we can admit we cannot go it alone. When the day comes that we our need for God is the same as our wanting God. Then we will know, just as those first apostles knew, that Jesus is calling us and Jesus is wanting us and Jesus is loving us. And all we have to do is attain the stunning realization that yes, "I am found and it is Jesus who has found me!"

Philip reached that remarkable conclusion and his life was transformed. He knew he was a changed man. But what, then did he do? Did he walk about with an air of smug satisfaction? Did he keep that knowledge like a lottery winner hiding the fact they hit the MegaMillions? No. The first think Philip did was to rush to his friend Nathaniel, a man as lost as he was, to tell him the Lord had found him. Philip was so excited, so happy, so satisfied, that he had to tell someone. And so he did. And so will you.

Friends, I have one question for you: what's your answer? I mean, how are we going to escape the morass of hatred and mutual suspicion in which we as a nation find ourselves? Should we, can we, will we tolerate more of the same? More of the same failed answers society is feeding us? More of the false hopes and false leaders?

We have reached the dead end. We can finally admit we are lost. And when we admit we are lost, we are finally open to being found. Found and found by Jesus Christ. Go ahead and get yourself found.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.