

**January 15, 2012**

**Sermon – Is it enough to just believe?**

**Scripture**

1 Samuel 3: 1-20

John 1: 43-51

It is a scant three weeks since we celebrated the incarnation in the birth of Jesus. We then welcomed the Magi for Epiphany. Last week was the baptism of the Lord. Incarnation, Epiphany and baptism, 30 years of the life of Jesus in just three weeks. Each of these three previous Sundays told us about whom Jesus was. At Christmas God was incarnated in the world as Jesus. Still a baby Jesus was named a King by the wise men. Then at 30 Jesus was confirmed as the Son of God at his baptism. Now what do we do?

We are at the crux of belief and action. We have heard in scripture and in the three sermons that Jesus is God, King, and Son. That is a lot to believe. Is it enough to just believe?

Apparently Jesus didn't think so. As he begins his ministry he has no intention of doing it alone. He also doesn't begin his ministry with a long-winded explanation of who he is. He doesn't remind people that they should know that he is God, King and Son. He does very little if any talking about himself.

Today's scripture starts out simply stating that the next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He decided, we don't know why, but that is where he went and there he found Philip and he said to him Follow me. He did not say listen to me, he said follow me as if the reason and the need would be self evident if Philip just came along. I think he meant follow and see what I do and do likewise. For Jesus believing didn't seem to be as important as doing

Ah but believing did to matter to some people. It was important to believe in the right person. When Philip found Nathanael and said to him: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael responded; "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael had a preconceived idea about whom he should believe in and he didn't think a person of that caliber would come from Nazareth.

Don't we all harbor-preconceived notions about people we don't know. They may be like Nathanael's, which was centered on where someone is from. Or it may be how educated a person is, or what they look like. It may be about what religion they are or that they do not practice a faith at all. What kind of car they drive or house they own may give us an impression of who we think a person is. All of these preconceived ideas about people keep us from actually knowing people for whom they are. This is judgment. We judge when we size a person up before we really know anything about them. Judging is a barrier that keeps us safe in our own little world of comfort, of knowledge and of power. Sometimes we judge others and sometimes others judge us.

Soon after I had purchased my Jeep I was at one of Westcliffe's gas stations when another Jeep pulled up. I man got out and began to pump his gas. We were only about 10 feet apart so I asked him; "How did he like his Jeep?" He ignored me. So thinking he had not heard me I asked again, have you had your Jeep long, how do you like it? It turned and with a sneer said; " Do I know you?" I was taken back, but never with out a come back I replied. Oh you don't live here in Westcliffe right? He nodded, I continued "Well that explains it, we all just talk to one another here." I had assumed that he was a local and I have found most often everyone is very friendly. We assume that we have met before or seen one another; this is a small community so why not be friendly? What he assumed about me can only be imagined. Is she talking to herself? Is she hitting on me, who knows? But obviously I must curtail my assumption that everyone is a local or that every local wants to talk to me, or your pastor will get the reputation of a woman on the make.

So even after Nathaniel's curt reply about the inferior nature of Nazareth, Phillip said; come and see. So he did and when he came face to face with Jesus, it was Jesus who spoke first and told him what he already knew about Nathaniel. Unlike Nathaniel Jesus was not basing his judgment of Nathaniel on his hometown, or his education or even his appearance. Jesus was basing his impression of Nathanael on his ability to see into his heart. He said, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is not deceit! Nathaniel answered him where did I get to know you and Jesus replied "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.

Jesus' words concerning Nathaniel's nature are impressive. Jesus calls him an Israelite with out deceit. In this instance Israelite means model faithfulness and has none of the ambiguities and shades of meaning that the term Jew carried. We don't know the significance of the fig tree, another one of the details included but not explained. The focus and what was impressive to Nathanael was Jesus' superhuman knowledge of who he was. In Nathanael's response he named who Jesus was. That he was the Son of God, and King of Israel.

Jesus then tells Nathanael if this revelation makes you believe just wait till you see what I am about to do. Nathanael might have inferred that Jesus was about to be some really big and showy things. But we know that Jesus' first ministerial actions where not big shows of power and might. They were individual miracles for unimportant, poor people. As we continue examining Jesus' ministry we will watch as he gathers more followers, casts out unclean spirits, and heals all kinds of illness in the poor and oppressed people he encounters. His lack of glam and glitter and his compassion for the poor illustrate how radical his ministry is and will continue to be. His power does not come from the Romans, from the rich and powerful nor does he seek these sections of the society to heal, help and teach. No he speaks to those among his own people, God's people, which become all people who need and desire to believe and follow.

Nathanael was impressed by Jesus' ability to see into his heart. This ability changed Nathanael's mind and he too became a follower of Jesus. But Jesus had another message before this particular scripture is finished. He tells Nathanael that he hasn't seen anything yet. Then Jesus tells him what he will see. He will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." What does this mean, angels flying back

and forth from heaven? This could be a bit distracting. But Nathanael is going to understand because he has studied this his verse of scripture from the Hebrew Bible. Nathanael will recall in Genesis the story of Jacob and his dream of the ladder between heaven and earth. Jacob's dream wakes him up to the realization that God is in this place. Nathanael would also remember the scripture in Daniel about the decent of man. This going back and forth from heaven to earth is Jesus' way of explaining that he is now the bridge between the two worlds. He has a divine aspect once again God, King, Son, but he lives on earth. He is the way to bridge the distance between God and the people. God is no longer that just that huge omnipresence entity above. Now a part of that God is wearing sandals and standing beside you.

In the book the Adult Forum is Studying, *Saving Jesus from the Church*, Robin Myers concludes chapter five by discussing how Christianity is now so fundamentally associated with the beliefs about Jesus instead of the invitation to follow Jesus. He calls for a new Reformation that will not deal with matters of doctrine and church order but with a recovery of the concepts of discipleship. It will call for a return to faith as praxis, practice, grounded in trust not intellectual assent. He ends by saying Christianity must be focused on following Jesus, not about worshipping Christ.

Today we are presented with tow important ideas that come from the initiation of Jesus' ministry. First see beyond your own preconceptions. Delay judgment so that you might really get to know a person or a people. Getting to really know someone is seeing the spark of the divine within them, like the perception of Nathaniel by Jesus.

Second when we better understand each other then we can believe together. After we believe we are read to do more.

Jesus is divine yet he walks on two legs with the same dirty sandaled feet of everyone else. He leads people like Phillip and Nathanael that may have doubts abut where they are going. He does not say believe in me he says follow me. Believing is not enough. It is time to start walking.