**John 1:43-51 January 17, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of John the first chapter here re-reading these words. “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jesus ministry has begun. To get a sense of the context of these verses from John 1, we have to look at the verses that come right before them. Earlier in John 1 we see John the Baptist “passing the torch” of his ministry as he declares Jesus “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. Already Jesus has sprung into action, as two of John the Baptist’s disciples follow Jesus, the one being named as Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and the second perhaps being John himself, the author of this Gospel. Jesus is going around, recruiting disciples, combing the countryside, and picking out those who will join him as he spreads his message of truth, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies all throughout the land. But what sorts of men are these? Are they the best and the brightest? The most influential and powerful? Or are they meek and common men, who God uses for a higher purpose?

How do you find “the good ones?” That’s the question for any job recruitment company. Or any company that is looking for a capable individual to join their team. It’s at the heart of college athletics, especially after we saw Alabama beat Ohio State this past week for the National Championship. Is it really a question why those 2 teams would be in the championship? They consistently receive the top recruits every year. If the best players in the world are picking colleges to play for, they are drawn to championships and opportunity. Recruitment is all about finding the biggest, the best, and the brightest to come and join you in whatever you’re doing. I imagine there must be some kind of strategy that gets cooked up for just about every player that sits down with a coach and hears their “pitch” about coming to their school.

In a way that’s what Jesus was doing with these men. And it’s interesting that some, like Philip, just had to see Jesus, and hear him say the words “Follow Me”. That was enough for Philip. He was on board, and willing to go and tell his friends and recruit them as well to join this amazing ministry of the Son of God. Yet Nathanael was a different kind of recruit. Nathanael had doubts about the reputation of anyone who comes from Nazareth, asking “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Now this could be a specific put down of the area that Jesus was raised, or could also point to the fact that no Old Testament prophecies spoke of a Messiah or King coming from Nazareth. The point remained that there were doubts about if this person, whom Philip was convinced was special, could possibly be the Son of God; the promised Messiah, and the Savior of the world.

Hesitation. Doubt. Anxiety about making the right decision. It’s all part of life. It’s all part of making big choices. For a recruit who is faced with multiple schools, it’s about weighing the options and making sure that they make the best decision for themselves and for their future. It was an amazing statistic that came out after Alabama won, that Nick Saban successfully won a championship with each of his recruiting classes in his time at Alabama. He fulfilled his promise to each of those young men that if they joined his team, he would make them a champion. Whether we realize it or not, we are being recruited. But only by two teams. The team of us, and the team of God. God is calling us, constantly, through His Word, through His Sacraments, to come and follow Him and the path he has set out for us in our lives. To serve Him willingly, and joyfully in all that we do, as His children and His disciples in this world.

He promises life and eternal salvation in His Word. But on the other hand we have the team of death, destruction, eternal separation and sin. That is what is waiting for us on this team if we become followers of ourselves and of the devil and his demons, but it’s portrayed to us in a different way. The devil doesn’t come to us with the truth, He instead pitches us the promises of happiness in this world. Of self-satisfaction and never having to answer to anyone in anything that we do. It’s not joining the devil’s team, or sin’s team, or death’s team, it’s simply joining a team captained by *yourself*. The pitch is, that you get to decide what’s best in everything that you do. You get to lead. And never have to follow. You get to decide what’s right and what’s wrong. It’s no different from the temptation given to Adam and Eve by Satan in the garden, you will get to be on the same level as God. If you join God’s team, God will keep you from all of the different things that make you happy, but on this team you can simply do, whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want, and as much as you want. God’s Word says that drunkenness is a sin? Throw it out! Do what you want. As we see in 1 Corinthians, a call to flee from giving your flesh and your body over to the sinful sexual desires that surround us in this sinful world. God says to flee from it, and to regard our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, but on the other hand, it’s our bodies, we can do…what we want. God’s Word says it’s wrong? Who cares, I’m going to do what I want. I’m going to give to God what I want. I’m going to serve God when I want. I’m going to live however I want and no one can tell me otherwise.

Of the two teams, and the two pitches one seems lucrative and attractive, the promise to live my life in supreme independent happiness, while the other says that I have to conform to the Will of someone else. That’s the temptation, to give in to ourselves and our desires, rather than what God’s Word promises is true. To make our own truth, and ignore the real truth. The real truth that says, The wages of sin is death. The real truth of the Law that points out that idolatry, and sexual immorality, and covetousness, as well as everything else laid out in the 10 commandments are sinful and wrong. The real truth, that after following after our own desires we find ourselves lost. Alone. Afraid, and unable to find a path that leads back to lasting and eternal happiness. As Isaiah says, “we like sheep have gone astray, each one of us going our own way.” A life lived for ourselves and our own desires is like that of a child who gets everything that they want. Eventually nothing is enough, there is no truth, and they are left with nothing.

When God calls us and recruits us He does it for our benefit, not His own. He calls us with His love and mercy because He knows that we need Him, not the other way around. And it’s amazing to look at the men that God calls as examples of who he uses to do His Will in this world. None of these men were great leaders. None of them had political power and any sway in Rome at the time. They were commoners. They were men who were sitting underneath trees, and fishing in boats. As Martin Luther says. “Christ chooses as His apostles the poorest and lowliest He can find.” To lead the Church he choose the poorest and the lowliest. And to continue in His mission and in the work that He has set out to be done in the Church today, He has called you.

He has called you to be more than just a blind follower of your every desires and happiness. He has called you and sanctified you, setting you apart for His work. He has adopted you as His child and bought you with a price. As Paul writes in our Epistle lesson this morning, after admonishing the people and warning against sexual immorality, he reminds them, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” The price? His blood. His suffering. His pain. His death. He died for you, stricken, smitten, and afflicted, giving over his personal happiness, and comfort so that you would be saved from yourself. That’s the love that God has for you. That’s the “pitch” so to speak that God has made to you, not that you now can choose to follow Him, or choose for Him to be your Savior, for He died for you while you were still His enemy and covered in sin. He is truly, exactly what Philip says when Jesus tells him that He saw him under the fig tree. Jesus Christ is “The Son of God, The king of Israel.” And the one who has saved us from eternal death and destruction.

He has recruited all of us to His team, to do His Will, and to follow him in our lives. He has called us and adopted us as his very own children. We all have been washed clean of sinfulness and shame through the waters of Holy Baptism, and brought into God’s family forever. Life and salvation were given as a gift to all of us, and now our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, paid for with the blood of the perfect Lamb of God. We are set apart, to serve the Lord with gladness, and grow in knowledge and understanding of His Will through the study of God’s Word and the reception of His sacraments.

Jesus’ work had just begun in John chapter 1. And as we continue in this season of Epiphany we will see how His ministry continued, How His Will was completed, and how He used unworthy servants for amazing and glorious things. In the same way, as we journey in our lives, as we do the work that God has called us to do, may we continue to fight the temptation to switch over to a team that is focused solely on our own happiness. May we never stop studying and learning the perfect and Holy Will of God revealed in His Word as He speaks to us the truth. And May we always remember His call to us, that promises salvation and everlasting life to all who believe on His name.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.