

(prayer) May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, O' Lord.

Church: what does a disciple of Jesus Christ do? (pause) A disciple makes disciples. When a disciple makes a disciple the two of them work to move closer to God together while reaching out to make new disciples along the way. We are supposed to work together to grow closer to God and sometimes that means letting folks know when there has been a change so we can all benefit. For example, a couple of weeks ago the practice time for the Ukulele club at Denton Elementary changed what time the club would finish practice on Monday afternoons. The change was not clearly communicated. When our family found out Karen reached out to other parents we know to share this information. It is not about judging. It is not about scolding. The purpose of telling other parents about the change is to try to help others so we can all benefit together.

In this morning's passage Jesus found Philip, and said to Philip, "Follow me" (John 1:43). Philip was really excited by both being found by Jesus and for being asked to follow Jesus. Philip had met someone great, Jesus Christ. Philip wanted to share who he had found with others. Philip was not perfect. Philip had not yet been perfected in love. Philip had become a disciple of Jesus Christ and immediately began working to share Jesus with others.

As your pastor I immediately start asking questions. How did Jesus convince Philip who Jesus is and to become a disciple? All Jesus said to Philip was, "Follow me" (John 1:43). Is that really all there is to it? When I think about my own life that's not how it was for me. My Grandmother would talk to me about God. My Mom taught my brother and I to pray in the crib. My Dad taught my brother and I to pray the Lord's prayer and was always there to help us find the answers to our questions in the Bible. It wasn't so simple for me as saying, "Follow Jesus." That was always the message at home, but I was not as quick to follow Jesus as Philip. Maybe some of you have been slow to respond to the call of Christ. Maybe you have reached out to people and wondered why they did not immediately jump at the opportunity to follow Jesus Christ.

Let's step back and think about what happens when Christ reaches out to us. Tell me church. Let's see if you can remember. What calls us to God? (pause for response) What helps us to peel away the veneer of denial and the lies we tell ourselves that our lives are okay just the way they are? (pause for response) What helps us to see our need for God, and draws us closer to the cross of Jesus Christ? (pause for response) What draws us closer to God is grace. God's preventing or prevenient grace calls out to us when we are not aware, we need God. Through prevenient grace God reaches out to every one of us. Sometimes God's grace plows the field before the seeds of salvation in Jesus Christ are planted. I am confident God's prevenient grace opened Philip to Jesus' invitation.

It was not so easy for Philip when he reached out to Nathanael. Maybe some of y'all know what that feels like. Maybe some of y'all know what it is like to reach out to someone about coming to church and to be told, "No." (pause) or perhaps, "Yeah. I'll come check it out," and they never walk through the church doors. (pause) Maybe some of y'all know what that feels like. I know what that feels like. It feels like a put down. It feels like they are rejecting me. (pause) It feels like they are rejecting you. (pause) Church, when someone tells gives you a, "No," to an invitation to church who are they rejecting? (pause) Are they rejecting you? (pause) No. They are rejecting the Church. Most have never been to our church. They do not know our God. They might be thinking how can anything good come from that church? They may not know anything about our church. They may have only heard things about churches in general. How can anything good come from that church? (pause) When Philip told Nathanael about Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael's words sound pretty similar to the criticism about going to church. Can anything good come from that church? How should we respond when people tell us, "No," or lie to us about coming to church?

Well... I have seen people criticize others over Facebook for not attending church. I have seen people take to social media for not bringing their children up in church, and I have to admit. Today it is an easy thing to do to fall in to.

Christians judge others on social media for not meeting our expectations about church attendance; (pause) how people live their lives (pause) how people spend their time (pause) and how people raise their children. (pause) I am sure I don't have to tell y'all about the way people treat each other on social media about politics, religion and the LGBTQ stuff. It's terrible. And then we come to church and wonder, why aren't more people sitting in our pews? I have no way of knowing this for sure, but I don't think anyone has come to church after being judged and ridiculed over social media. Come to think of it I don't think anybody comes to church after being judged and ridiculed in real life. I know that's not what drew me to church.

When I was in middle school I went to a youth group at a very small United Methodist Church because a couple of friends went to church there. I began attending worship because the older people of the church had expectations for the youth and insisted that if the youth didn't start attending worship they were going to get rid of the youth group. My family did not attend church. My folks would drop me off at the door and pick me up after. We were a Boy Scout family. Once a month our Scout Troop would go camping, and I would miss a Sunday at church. Sure enough on my way out of church the following Sunday morning the minister would shake my hand and offer me guilt about missing the week before. Do you know how I responded to that pastor's guilt? I skipped church the next week. When I started working a part-time job in high school occasionally I would have to work on Sunday. That same minister would give me grief on my way out the door from church on the following Sunday's. So you know what I did? (pause) I'd skip the next two Sundays. (pause) No. It wasn't right. I know it was not the right way to handle that issue, but I am willing to bet I am not the only one who responds to church criticism and judgment that way. Criticism, condescension, and ridicule keep people from coming to church. Judgment runs people out of church. We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ, but if we start judging one another for not meeting our expectations we are doing the opposite of what Jesus told us to do. Y'all remember Jesus' Great Commission? **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"** (Matt 28:19).

If we are going to do better, we have to ask the question, "How did Philip get Nathanael to meet Jesus?" When Philip said to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law, and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," Nathanael's response was incredulous at best. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" (John 1:45-46)? Nathanael had little respect for Nazareth; anything from Nazareth, and I suspect Philip's judgment about this Jesus from Nazareth. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael's statement drips with judgment. However, Philip's response does not. Philip does not respond out of anger, resentment or rejection. Philip simply says, "Come and see" (John 1:46).

Philip's life had been impacted by God's prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is the grace that comes before and grace – not judgment brought Philip to Jesus. Now Philip is relying on God's grace to do the same with Nathanael. Philip offers Nathanael grace. Philip does not offer an argument. Philip does not offer justification. Philip does not try to argue the merits of Nathanael's statement. Philip simply says, "Come and see." Philip knew Who had found Philip. Philip knew the good person Philip was offering to Nathanael. Philip acted on faith the proof was in the pudding.

We have had some new people come to church in the last six months. Have y'all ever paused to wonder why they started coming to church? Some of them had been invited again and again for years. What is different? What changed that they were able to come now? How can we duplicate that success so we are able to invite more people to church, and more importantly offer an opportunity for more people to accept saving faith in Jesus Christ? I think instead of assuming we know the answer we should ask our new people. (pause) I am pretty sure the answer was found in more grace and less judgment. I believe this is the work of a disciple.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
Amen