

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Where Did You Get To Know Me?****Lesson: John 1:43-51 NRSV**

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ 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." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ 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."

Good morning Church! Today I want to start with two questions. Willow River Parish family, "How did you become a Christian?" and "How did you become a Methodist?" We have a lot of meetings in our lives. And, we have influenced and been influenced by others through a lot of meetings and relationships. I assume your values, beliefs, habits, philosophies, faith, and tradition have been influenced by your family, close friends, and your neighbors. Perhaps the reason you became a Christian, and the reason you became a Methodist was also through that influence.

In today's Gospel lesson, Philip and his friend, Nathanael, and Jesus are described. Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. (44) When Jesus met him, Jesus said to him, "Follow me," (43) then he decided to follow him. His personality is described through Jesus' question before Jesus fed a large crowd. Jesus said to him, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5, NRSV) Then, he answered, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." (John 6:7, NRSV) We can assume that he was smart with numbers, rational, and realistic. And, when Jesus called him with Andrew and Peter, he decided to become Jesus' disciple. And, when he found his friend, Nathanael, he said, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." (45) Then, Nathanael said doubtfully to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (46) His suspicions are reasonable enough. In the first century, Nazareth was considered as the border of a Gentile country, and it was sometimes called "Galilee of the Gentiles." So, he had doubts when he heard that Messiah came from Nazareth.

There is an expression: "A picture is worth a thousand words." What Philip could say to Nathanael was, "Come and see" (46) rather than any explanation of Jesus. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" (47) Then, Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." (48) Then, Nathanael confessed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (49)

In Israel, which has a hot climate, fig trees provide a cool shade. I think Nathanael was simply exhausted and he must have been resting under the fig tree. Perhaps, he had a spiritual thirst as well as physical. Micah 4:4 (NRSV) tells that "They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid..." In the first

century, sitting under fig trees might have meant praying and yearning for God. So, we can assume that he was praying for Israel and yearning for God. When Jesus saw his heart, he said to him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is not deceit!” (47)

Nathanael met Jesus through his friend, Philip, but he had doubts while meeting Jesus. However, when Jesus knew his heart and touched him, the doubt of Nathanael turned to conviction, and he confessed, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (49) Like this, when the Lord touches our hearts, our doubts turn to conviction.

Let me share my story briefly, I was born and raised up in a Korean Methodist family. When my parents got married, my mother was writing her thesis at a Methodist seminary, and my father was an ordinary office worker, but later he felt God’s calling and went to the seminary for his M.Div. degree where my mother graduated. After that, he was ordained as an Elder through the ordination process. I went to church every Sunday with my parents and my journey of faith was started by my parents. I was raised up in church learning about Jesus Christ. However, I liked math and science and I thought I am a rational person having doubts about faith. I used to have questions like “Is God alive? Why do I have to pray?” and I couldn’t understand church people who cried while singing songs or listening to messages. When I became a sophomore in high school, I was busy preparing for the SAT, but during this important time, my father recommended me to attend the Holy Spirit Revival that lasts three days, all day and night. And, at there, I heard a testimony of a pastor’s kid. He confessed that God touched him and met him. When I heard that, I felt envy because I thought God has never touched my heart, even though I am a pastor’s kid like him and pray to God like him. So, I decided to pray to meet and experience God’s love during the three days.

On the second evening of the revival, I was praising and praying with people as usual. But, I felt something new I had never felt before. Something touched my mind, and I was relaxed and felt warmth. And, tears flowed plentifully though I didn't know why I was crying, but I was glad and very happy. At the moment, my values of life were totally changed and I was able to embrace and experience the love and grace of God. And, I decided to live for God. Later, when I asked my father about that, I realized that God touched my heart.

Andrew, Peter, and Philip decided to follow Jesus, but if he did not call them and if they didn't open their minds to Jesus, they couldn't follow him. God's abundant love and grace goes beyond our knowledge, experiences, and reasons.

It can be different for each person to meet God. However, God always wants to meet all of us, whether we are poor, rich, good, or commit sins. Through intimate relationships with God, love and faith grow in our hearts, and this understanding and confession changes our lives. To those who embrace and open their minds to God and confess Jesus as the savior of our lives, Jesus said that "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (51) So, I hope you open your minds to embrace God's grace and love taking time each day to read the Bible, meditate, and pray to God. May you open your minds to the Holy Spirit and invite Him into your life. Amen.