

Jesus finds Philip, Philip finds Nathanael. Just before this, Andrew finds his brother, Simon Peter. There sure is a lot of “finding” going on here isn’t there? As if it’s all one big game of hide and seek.

Now in hide and seek, the whole idea is to stay hidden. The winner is the one who cannot be found. It is crucial, therefore, to find a place to hide that will be overlooked. It appears, therefore, that Philip, Nathanael, and Peter are not very good at playing the game. Jesus has no trouble finding Philip it seems. Philip easily finds Nathanael. And Andrew knows exactly where to find his brother.

Perhaps, though, this is no game to them. Perhaps this is the exact opposite of a game. It’s real life. And, in fact, it’s what life is really all about. In real life it is vital, absolutely necessary, that we do not stay in our hiding places. The winner, in real life, is not the one who cannot be found, but the one who is found. And let me add this: found by Jesus.

It’s not as Philip tells it. “*We have found...Jesus!*” he tells Nathanael. Oh really? But it’s Jesus who decides to go to Galilee. And it’s Jesus, it says, who finds Philip. Now maybe Philip is mixed up on who finds who because Jesus had found the perfect place to hide. Nazareth. He was hiding in Nazareth. At least it appears this way. “*We have found Him...Jesus of Nazareth!*” Philip tells Nathanael. “*Nazareth!*” replies Nathanael, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*”

Nazareth is the perfect place to hide. For one thing, it is a town of questionable reputation. You don’t go to Nazareth seeking someone great and important. You might look for a criminal there, but not the Son of God. Nothing meaningful ever happened in Nazareth. And besides, Nazareth is never even mentioned in the Old Testament. No prophet ever pointed to Nazareth as the place people should look for the Messiah.

Nonetheless, Philip is convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Promised One. It’s no game to him. He is dead serious. And he invites Nathanael to take Jesus of Nazareth seriously as well. “*Come and see,*” he tells him.

Now, in our day it’s pretty obvious that many people see Jesus as only a game. He is not real life to them. Look at how they live. Jesus is not a part of their real life. He may as well be hiding out in Nazareth because they show no interest in finding Him where He wants to be found: in His Word and Sacraments.

But although this is most people, it should not be us. Jesus already found us in our baptism. He called us into His family and made us His disciples. So, we of all people, should not be treating Jesus as if He is only a game, a game of hide and seek.

And yet we do. Only it’s not Jesus who is hiding from us. We are the ones who hide from Him. Not all the time. There are times when we come out of hiding. We open the door to His house and come inside to take a seat in the pew. There are times when we openly talk about Jesus with our friends and family. But then there may be more times when we retreat into our hiding places.

There are parts of our daily life we like to keep hidden, even from Jesus. Like those times when we are actively sinning.

But life is no game. In a game, there are no winners and losers as long as everyone is having fun. Anyone who treats Jesus as a game, who hides from Him, may have fun now, but in time their fun will come to an end.

It's not fun to repent, but we must. If Jesus has been more of a game to us than really a part of our life, we must repent. If we have been hiding from Jesus, hiding our secret sins from Him, it's time to openly confess them.

You are no game to Jesus. You are real life to Him. You are His life. He did not play hide and seek when it came to your salvation. He did not hide from His attackers. He openly gave Himself up to His crucifiers. And even though you may have been hiding from Him, He does not see it as a game to come and seek you out in your hiding place. He finds you not to yell at you, not to condemn you for your sins. He seeks you in order to show you the nail marks in His hands and feet. To assure you that His blood, shed upon the cross, is more than enough to cover all your sinfulness, even those secret sins you like to hide.

And Jesus knows where to look for you. He came out of Nazareth. And so, with you and me, Jesus does not look in high and lofty places. He looks for us in those places where our sins have taken us. There is no hiding place out of Jesus' reach.

Wherever you have been in life, Jesus calls to you to come and follow Him. "*You are a hiding place for me,*" cries the psalmist with joy. You can hide yourself in Jesus. No sin in your past can bother you there. He forgives all your sins. Yes, He truly does. He forgives all of you. And right now, in your present life, no trouble, and no cause for despair, can harm you, not when you hide yourself in Jesus.

You are safe with Him. Safe in your baptism. Safe here in His house. Safe at His Table of forgiveness because here are the marks of the nails. Here, for you, is His crucified and resurrected body and blood.

This is no game. This is real life – your life in Christ which will never end. As Philip said to Nathanael: "*Come and you will see.*" Amen.