

John 1:43-51

A new husband can be pretty naive. "My wife was a good catch!" he proudly tells his friends. And yet if one were to look objectively at the facts, it was really the other way around. His wife is the one who caught him. But she was clever about it. She put her plan in motion in such a way that he would believe he found her, that he asked her out, and that he proposed marriage to her. And she is perfectly content to let him go through life believing such things.

Philip, who was from Bethsaida, was as naive as a new husband. Jesus made the decision to go to Galilee. Jesus found Philip, and Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." But when Philip was telling Nathanael what happened, he told him what a good catch Jesus was; that he, Philip, had found Him.

If you have any friends who are evangelical Christians, you may hear the same thing from them. "I found Jesus," is the way they speak about their faith. I overheard a young man saying this to his high school classmates, and I promptly posed the response, "I did not realize that Jesus was lost." And this really gets to the heart of the matter. If Jesus is the one who found me, this means that I am the one who was lost...and people, including all of us, have a hard time swallowing this. If I'm lost, then I'm not in control of my life. I don't know where I am, and so I cannot know where I am going. If I'm lost, then there's something deep down wrong with me. Then I need to be found. Then I have no business pretending that I have all the answers.

Not just new husbands, but men in general have a hard time admitting they're lost. Which is why they hate to stop the car and ask for directions. This may also somewhat explain why a lot of men hate to go to church. They do not want to admit they are spiritually lost either. But it's not just men. No one likes to admit defeat; to say with humility, "I am the one who needs help." When a marriage is in trouble, it's always the other one, not me, who is the problem. When a church committee cannot agree, it's everyone else, not me, who is in the wrong. Last month a car traveled up Interstate 55 toward St. Louis going north in the southbound lanes. For five miles the driver was traveling in the wrong direction, most likely thinking, "Why is everyone, but me, going the wrong way?"

And this is how you and I travel through life. Well, today it's time to stop your car and turn in the other direction. It's time to admit, "I am the one in the wrong. I am the one who is lost. I need to be found." To say such things is not within our make-up. It is a foreign language to us. Only by the power of God, by His Spirit at work in us--and He is here today for you because His Word of Truth is here--will you and I confess from the heart, "I am a poor, miserable sinner...I have offended God and I have hurt my neighbor...Every day I become lost in my sins...I need help...I need to be found."

This is serious business. That wrong-way driver perished in a car crash. And God, who loves the sinner, and who desires that no one perishes forever, greatly desires that we should repent. He drew you here today so that His Law would convict you of sin, and through His Gospel, Jesus would find you and forgive you.

That's why He made the decision to go to Galilee. He went there to find Philip, and then through Philip to find Nathanael. And through these men--later His apostles--to find many more who were lost in their sins. And so Jesus also made the decision--not you, not me--He chose to find you, a lost and condemned creature, and to call you by His Gospel and rescue you from sin and eternal death.

This finding, this rescuing happens in Holy Baptism. It's where Jesus found you and me "dead in our trespasses and sins," and where He made you alive with Christ forgiving your transgressions. You

see, when God comes looking for sinners, it is an act, never of anger, but always of grace. Our first parents became lost after disobeying God in the Garden. And He found them not to punish, but to give them His promise of the One who would come to save them. He first wanted them to admit they were lost. He did not say, "Where are you?" in order to locate them, but to let them reply, "I am lost!" Yet, they refused to admit it. Instead, "It's not me who is lost," said Adam, "it's my wife." "It's not me who is lost," replied Eve, "it's the serpent." "It's not us, God. You are the one who is lost." "You gave me that woman." "You put that serpent in the Garden." "You, God, are the one going in the wrong direction, not us."

And so God, in His mercy, told them what He would do. He would send His Son to, indeed, go in the wrong direction--to head toward certain death...to walk toward a lonely cross; to suffer persecution, contempt, ridicule with every step; to bear the sins of the whole world, including yours. God is the only one who knows where He is. He is not lost; all mankind is. And yet God chose to become lost for you. He entered the darkness of hell and endured your punishment, suffered what you and I deserve so that you would never know what it's like to be eternally lost. So that today through His Word coming into your ears, and His body and blood coming into your mouth, He finds you. No matter how lost you are, He finds you and forgives you.

Last week may have been a terrible week for you--your life out of control, heading in all the wrong directions, your sinful urges getting the best of you. It does not matter to God how far gone you have been; how lost you are. Because today He finds you. He reminds you that you are His baptized child in Christ Jesus. You belong to Him. You are not lost--you are right now in His arms of mercy. He is present here with you to forgive all the sins of your past, and they are forgiven--you are forgiven. He welcomes you to His Table and through bread and wine He enters you so that His life is in you, His strength is yours, His victory over the power of sin and Satan is your victory.

And if you, friend, are a sinner who has been thus found, found by the mercy of God, then be a Philip. Go and find your Nathanael--your loved one, your dear friend whose life is still going in the wrong direction; who is one for whom Christ died; one who needs to be found by a loving God. It's not you, it's not me--it's God who finds Nathanaels through us, just as He found us. No one finds Jesus. But all who are found by Him are no longer lost. They know who they are, where they are, and where they are going. Amen.