

Psalm 66:1-6, 16-20 *New Revised Standard Version*

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise. Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you. All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him, Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

John 1:43-51 *New Revised Standard Version*

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."

Now I know that this may date some of you,
but do you remember ever watching the TV show, "Laugh-In"?

In one of the regular comedy sketches,
Lilly Tomlin played an old time telephone switchboard operator,
who would always ask the person on the other end of the line,
"Have I reached the person to whom I am speaking?"

Have I reached the person to whom I am speaking? Think about that.
Theologically, that is an astute and challenging question ---
both as individual Christians and together as a church.

Are we reaching the world, reaching the people that we encounter,
our community with Christ's message of hope, healing and grace?

The world, our culture and the social climate all around us,
it's severely defective, corrupted, broken, angry and embittered,
and there is desperate need for people to be reached
with the truth of God's healing and gracious love.

Look around, there are a lot of people, right here in our community
struggling to make sense of their lives and current events,
and I see our church called to be a safe place of sanctuary,

where people can experience mercy & be drawn nearer to the Lord,
where they can discover the grace, peace and goodness of God,
but are we reaching our community with Christ's message of love?

Years ago, outside Gate 4 at the Amphibious base in Norfolk, VA,
I used to see a group of folks from one of the local churches
gathered there for their form of evangelism and outreach.

They would stand out on the median strip and by the side of the road,
waving – or perhaps brandishing their Bibles like weapons,
shouting vivid descriptions of hell, screaming Bible verses
while hollering threats of God's coming wrath and judgment.

It was kind of scary for any passing motorists or pedestrians.

In fact, I used to go out of my way just to avoid having
to pass through that intersection on Saturday nights.

I can't imagine how any such display would draw anyone to follow Jesus

In stark and striking contrast

to that sort of highly aggressive and in-your-face evangelism,
in the passage that we just heard read from John's gospel,
we get a very different and far more gentle picture

of someone being invited and coming to follow Jesus, vs. 43,

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

"Follow me." The form of that word in the Greek is fascinating.

It specifically describes

something that has been done and that continues to be done –

meaning, follow me now and keep on following me.

The invitation from Jesus is simple, straightforward and calm,

and we also know that it was life-transforming and effective,

for according to the New Testament,

Philip did faithfully travel with Jesus from then on,

and in Acts 8 we read about Philip preaching in Samaria.

Continuing with the John passage, after Jesus called him,

Philip then tells Nathanael about this Jesus of Nazareth, vs. 45-46

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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Historically, ancient Nazareth wasn't a very impressive place.

Nazareth was a tiny and insignificant no-place in nowhere,

and worst of all, a corrupt place filled with gentiles,

hardly the sort of place you'd expect to find the Messiah.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth?...leads to a more personal question

Can anything good - does anything good come from me?

In truth our God delights in surprises beyond our expectations,

even if our failings & flaws make us feel **like we're a Nazareth,**

by choice God accomplishes the extraordinary through the ordinary

and our struggles can be the way that God enlarges our vision & hope.

Which means that with our God of mystery, healing and wonder,

neither the past, nor our failings or present situation

has power to define or determine what will be our future.

We may think that we've reached the end and that it's all over.

We may think that there is no cause or reason for hope,

but that's not true – **that's not ever true with our God.**

God's invitation and call is always merciful and empowering,

challenging us to live out significant and meaningful lives

filled with purpose, love, joy, peace, wonder and hope ...

... well beyond anything that we might think is possible or probable.

There is another important point that I want to focus on today.

Notice the phrasing, that Philip **found** Nathanael.

The Greek is quite explicit in this passage,

that Philip by design and intention made an effort

to invite and explain who Jesus is to Nathanael...

... sometimes we Presbyterians are a bit hesitant to talk about faith.

Go ahead, ask yourself, **who and when was the last time**

that you actually tried to tell someone about Jesus and grace,

or about the significance & influence of faith in your life?

Now I don't think that necessarily means
adopting tactics such as I observed and avoided in Norfolk,
but rather our texts suggest a more respectful approach of
inviting others to reflect on their relationship with God.

And when Nathanael doesn't respond right away to words about Jesus,
notice that Philip doesn't argue or brow-beat him into believing,
it's a simple conversation & invitation, *Come and See for Yourself*,
-- just meet him and you can then make up your own mind.

This is the same process that is being celebrated in Psalm 66.

The first step, is simple, non-threatening and broad, vs. 5-6
*Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals. He turned the sea into dry land;
they passed through the river on foot.*

This is our God who liberates the captive and the slave,
as exemplified in the story of the Exodus from Egypt,
known and revealed by what God has done – by God's awesome deeds.

Then it moves to the more specific and personal, vs. 16-17, 19

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. I cried aloud to him, ... truly God has
listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.
So, let me tell you what God has done for me in particular!

In the Psalm, the first step, come and see what God has done.
Second step, come and listen to what God has done for me,
hear my story, my encounter and experience with the Lord.

This is the process, the two movements toward faith development,
that is also described in the passage we read earlier from John.

First step, Philip found Nathanael then he described who Jesus was.
After that, in the second part, he invited him, "*Come and see*",
'have your own encounter and experience with Jesus.

We are not all called to become Bible scholars and theologians,
but we are all called to share and **tell our stories of faith**,
for our faith is far more than just learning biblical facts.

It is far more than just right theology and church doctrine,
but rather, it's about having a relationship with Jesus Christ,
it is how God's love, presence and truth influences our lives.

It's how in response to God's love, that grace guides how we live,
and that is our faith story that we can & are called us to share,
which is really about serving God right where we are,
faithful right where the Lord has chosen to place us.

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria was very pious,
and grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch.
He made application to a local monastery, and asked to be accepted
as a contemplative to spend the rest of his life at the monastery.

The abbot in charge asked him,
"do you understand that the pledge is one of obedience,
and that it will be hard because you have been a king?"
King Henry replied, "Yes, I understand, and that for the
rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

The abbot replied,
"Then I will tell you what to do. Go back to your throne
and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you."

As Christians, it is helpful and even necessary to remember & trust
that God has chosen to plant us in a specific place and context,

and that Christ expects us to be faithful wherever he's put us,

to be faithful and useful, to serve from wherever God chose for us
for God's desire and purpose, God's intention for our lives, AND
it is not necessarily so much about what we've accomplished,
as it is for us to grow into whoever we're created to become.

There was a weak, sickly man, whose condition seemed to grow worse.
He lived in the deep back woods in an old log cabin
and out in front of his cabin there was a huge boulder.
One night in a vision, God told him to go out there
and push the huge rock all day long, day after day.

The man got up early and eager the next morning,
and with great excitement began to push the rock until lunch,
then he rested a while and pushed the rock until supper time.

Pushing against the rock gave him a sense of meaning and purpose.
Day after day he pushed, and the days became weeks,
and weeks into months, as he continued to push against the rock.

After more than 9 months of pushing that boulder out front,
the weak & sickly man was getting tired of pushing the rock,
and in his weary tiredness he started to doubt his dream.

One day, curious, he measured to see how far he had moved the rock.
After weeks of pushing, he realized he hadn't moved the boulder.
In fact, the boulder was in the same place as when he started.

The man was incredibly disappointed, upset and frustrated,
that after 9 months he felt all his work had accomplished nothing.
He was tired and his dream seemed dashed upon the rock.

The man complained to God, "you know how sick and weak I am,
and then this dumb dream gave me a false and futile hope
and I have pushed with all that was within me for over 9 months.
That rock is still right where it was when I started."

Then the Lord said to him, "I never told you to move the rock.
I only instructed you to push and keep pushing against the rock."
The man replied, "Yes Lord, that was the dream."

God told the man to step in front of the mirror and look at himself.
The man stepped in front of the mirror and saw himself.
He was amazed at what he saw, a strong muscular man.

He remembered that lately he had not been coughing at night.
And then he started thinking about how well he was feeling,
and the strength that he had built by pushing on the rock.
Then he realized that God's plan was not for the rock, but for the man.

Jesus wants us to follow him to the places where we need to grow,
where our particular gifts & uniqueness are best suited to serve,
and for us to be a faithful extension of God's own plan and purpose.

Our struggles, our challenges, heartaches and disappointments,
can be a part of the process, so don't be deciding by what we can see,
but trust that God can use it all to build up and deepen our faith.

Furthermore, no doubt right now, today at this particular moment
each of us are exactly where the Lord would have us to be & to serve,
so that God's grace can overflow and splash out onto others
so that we can become a blessing and hope to those in need.

**So, today, who through the Lord grace and call, am I becoming?
What is the visible message about God's love that my life declares?
What does my attitude, my words and deeds proclaim about the Lord?**

God bestows wonderful gifts to each for benefit of the whole church,

and gives us each grace and blessing beyond our salvation,
equipping us to do something extraordinary, **to do ministry.**

Our call today is to find faithful ways that demonstrate and reflect
God's transforming love, healing forgiveness, hope and grace
to more and more of our friends, neighbors & those we encounter.

As we are promised and assured in Scripture, (Romans 8)

For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
So what then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?