

# “Telling a Good Story”

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany

*John 1:43-51*

*“Nathaneal said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see’” John 1:46*

We live in a culture that loves a good story. Scan the television channels, see what the local movie theaters are showing, or check out the latest offerings at your nearby Barnes and Noble and you will have all the evidence you need. A couple of weeks ago in our Sunday morning adult Bible Study class one of the students pointed to the fact that Jesus told stories to illustrate great truths about the Kingdom of God. We call those stories parables. A good story that stands the test of time, whether a movie, television show, a novel, or a parable of Jesus, it is one that identifies with the human condition. It identifies with our true human experiences. It rings true!

The Bible is a good story that rings true. There is a recent version of the Bible called *The Story* that has tried to pick up on this idea of the Bible as one complete story by presenting it that way. The Bible is the true story of God, our Heavenly Father, the creator and recreator of the heavens and the earth, working within human history to redeem an entire creation that has fallen from grace and is separated from him. Biblical Christianity also identifies with our true human experiences and gives a plausible answer that explains them. It deals in a plausible way with the fundamental questions of human existence: why do we die and what follows death? Biblical Christianity is God’s true “life organizing story” that accounts for the human condition in a way no other story does.

In the Gospel reading we see Philipp bringing Nathaniel into God’s story by bringing him to Jesus (Jn 1:43-51). We learn that Jesus went to the region of Galilee and found a man named Philip from the city of Bethsaida. We don’t know anything about the conversation that Jesus had with Philip but we can assume that Philip became convinced that Jesus was some type of messianic figure since he finds Nathaniel and says to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn 1:45). Jesus shared the story of God and his promise of salvation with Philip and, in turn, Philip shared it with Nathaniel. He sought to bring Nathaniel into the God’s story by introducing him to Jesus.

In a similar way, God has brought us into his story of redemption and restoration of all of creation by using people to introduce us to Jesus. We have met the Jesus who saves us. Our ears have heard the saving message of the Gospel. Our eyes have read the story of God’s salvation in the Bible. Our mouths have prayed the prayers and sung the songs of God. Our bodies and souls have been washed clean with the waters of Holy Baptism. Our tongues have tasted and seen God’s forgiveness, life, and salvation in

the Lord's Supper. We have met Jesus, and like Nathaniel, we believe and trust in him, and have been brought into God's story of salvation.

On Sunday mornings we are brought into God's story *continually* through the liturgy. At Atonement we "embrace the traditions of the Church and represent them for this present time." The liturgy of the Church is a story in which we participate and are *rooted firmly* in Christ through Word and Sacrament—the ways God gives us his eternal, spiritual gifts of life, forgiveness, and salvation in the present.

We come on Sunday mornings remembering that we are the baptized people of God and begin "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." We confess our sins to God and receive the sure and certain word of forgiveness spoken through the Pastor. We hear the Word of God and grow in faith. We pray prayers and sing hymns and grow in faith. We lay all our needs before God and trust in his mercy through the song called the *Kyrie*, "Lord, have mercy." We prepare in a careful way to receive real body and blood of our Lord in the Service of the Sacrament, singing "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the Highest" along with the crowds who first welcomed Jesus as he rode on a donkey into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. We confess that the one whom we receive in the Lord's Supper is Jesus, the Lamb of God, as we sing those words right before receiving the meal. After having an experience with Jesus and receiving his salvation we sing the words that Simeon first sang when he saw the infant Jesus and held him in his arms, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation. . ." (Lk 2:29-31). Through the liturgy of the Church we meet Jesus and receive his gifts of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation. We grow in our faith and become more firmly rooted in Christ as we live our lives the other six days of the week.

So How do we witness to others and tell this story? How do we, like Philip with Nathanael, bring others to meet Jesus and experience God's story of salvation? Well, if it is true that everyone loves a good story, perhaps we can start by *listening to their story*. What are their struggles? What are their difficulties? What are they trusting in above all else to meet their needs and to help them through struggles and difficulties? What are they looking to for meaning in their lives? What are they looking to for their identity? What are they looking to for security? Will those things ultimately satisfy or will they experience inevitable disappointment that will leave them stuck in hopelessness?

Then we can relate our story. How has being a part of God's story of redemption and recreation in Christ given us true peace and hope that can be found in nothing else? How has being a part of God's Story of salvation helped us through the difficulties, struggles, and trials of life?

After listening to their story and relating our story we are in a better position to share God's Story. We can proclaim the story of redemption and recreation in Christ. We can proclaim the Gospel. For, all people need to hear it! We can proclaim a loving Heavenly Father who longs to have all people back in his heavenly household as soon as possible. We can proclaim the truth that this Heavenly Father has found a way to forgive the greatest of human offenses that separate us from having an eternal place in his house. We can proclaim that this Heavenly Father wants to adopt all people as his own holy children through a rebirth in the waters of Holy Baptism. He wants to unite all people to Christ and his death for

the forgiveness of sins and resurrection to new, eternal life. People love a good story. And God wants to use you to proclaim that story for others.

A friend of mine has found a unique way to share God's story with others. He is also a visual artist and a Pastor. He is currently pursuing a Doctorate degree in Visual Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary. He has a blog entitled "Eyes of Faith" where he displays artwork that he creates based on different Biblical readings. In this way he invites others to meet Jesus and be a part of God's story.



*Rev. Matthew Rosebrock, When Heaven and Earth Meet*

His drawing displayed here shows the heavens being opened up. Jesus on the cross is seen from below as the place where heaven and earth meet. Only by given eyes to see by God's Word, can we see this moment on the cross as the place where God comes to visit his people and offer to them life and salvation. It is not the way that the world or Nathanael, or you and I would have expected, but it is the only way to the Father, the true only true God. This drawing invites us to the place and the person where heaven and earth meet. We are then invited to bring others to the person of Jesus and the place of the cross. By the grace of God, sharing a good story. Telling God's story. Amen.