

Rev. Shaun Arndt  
Sunday, January 21, 2024  
Epiphany 2—Christ Reveals Himself Personally John 1:43-51

### *Called by Name*

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!  
And that is what we are! Amen.*

*Dear followers of Christ,*

Astronomers tell us that if you made a scale model of our solar system using a basketball for the sun, then the earth would be about the size of a pinhead.

You would be just a tiny, microscopic speck on that pinhead! Does that make you feel small? Unimportant? Insignificant?

Right now, there are over 8 billion people on this planet. That's easy to say, but consider this: They say that if you wanted to count out loud (like 1, 2, 3, 4, you get the idea) – if you wanted to count out loud to just 1 billion, it would take you 32 years and only if you 24 hours a day for those 32 years!

And you are just one out of an 8 billion big mass of humanity. Does that make you feel small? Unimportant? Insignificant?

There are of course other things, less academic, that make us feel that way. Loneliness. Illness. Disappointment, whether in self, others, or circumstances of life.

A little child in a giant world may feel small. The teenager trying to figure out their place in everything wrestles with insignificance. So does the middle-aged adult who didn't expect things to turn out the way they did or the senior citizen who starts to feel their world shrink along with importance.

Or anyone who wonders, what have I accomplished? I recall a beloved pastor and college pastor half-joking that teaching future pastors often felt like he was "spitting into the wind."

Of course, you know better for yourself than I do, what it is that makes you feel small, unimportant and insignificant.

Of course, you could turn to self-help and positive thinking resources to assure you that *you* matter. But in the eternal scheme of things, that is the blind leading the blind. The answer to meaning and purpose in life cannot be found in ourselves, but only in the Lord!

Of course, there's also the problem where we may feel full of self-importance because of our accomplishments, smarts, achievements, even what we have done for God.

But if that's the case, you are in danger. First because you're lying to yourself, all of that is not yours, but is a gift of God's unearned love. Second, because all such things can and will crumble and disappoint in the end. Looking for meaning and purpose outside of the Lord will end in eternal ruin and meaningless-ness.

And whether we feel we lack importance because of such things or feel we are full of importance because of what we have or do, it's really just the same side of the same sinful coin – that we are looking for meaning in all the wrong places!

The only answer that can save us from all this is found in the truth we see in our Gospel lesson. It is the truth that the Lord who made the vast universe and has given life to all 8 billion people on the planet knows and loves you personally. Indeed, He assures you that you are **Called by Name**.

Our Gospel lesson takes us to the earliest days of Jesus' public ministry. After he was baptized in the Jordan and tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus began to gather **disciples**.

**Disciple** means learner or follower. Jesus was calling them to believe He is the Son of God who **has the words of eternal life** and has come to raise up fallen humanity.

**Jesus... found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."** And then **Philip** would in turn find his friend **Nathanael** who would confess about Christ: **Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"**

There's something we might easily miss here, especially if we're familiar with other times Jesus went out and called people to be His disciples. We might think that's just how things were done back in that day. After all, it is true that **Rabbis**, religious teachers would have disciples who would follow them and learn from them. John the Baptist did and so did the Pharisees.

But history and Jewish writing reveals to us. Jesus was not going about this in the usual way at all!

You see, **Rabbis** did not go out and just walk up to people and ask them to follow. Rather, people would seek out a famous Rabbi and ask to become their disciple and if the applicant met their standards, the Rabbi would agree.

But as the gospel always does, Jesus flips everything upside down. His disciples do not choose Him. He chooses His disciples and **calls** them **by name**.

Jesus isn't here so much like a first century Jewish Rabbi as He acting as who He truly is, the LORD God who called Moses at the burning bush or who in our first lesson **came and stood there and called...** the young prophet by name: "**Samuel! Samuel!**"

You'll seek in vain for any special qualities about any of those whom Jesus called as disciples. They were not learned scholars or accomplished athletes or famous superstars, but ordinary every-day, simple people. Some of them, like **Nathanael**, we hardly know anything about.

But we know this. Since Jesus is the sinless Son of God, there is nothing in any sinful human being that could qualify them to be His disciple.

And so, Jesus doesn't seek out applications. He doesn't wait for people to get their act together. The Lord simply seeks and **calls** us **by name**. Calls us by grace- that is undeserved love! Jesus does not call us because we are good, but because He is good and gracious and saves us!

But what do you mean by 'us', pastor? Jesus hasn't walked up to us and **called** us by **name** like He did with **Philip** and **Nathanael**?

Oh yes, He did! Jesus says this about all who follow Him: **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** (John 6:44) He also says: **No one comes to the Father, except through me.** (John 14:6) **And** our Lord declares: **You did not choose me, but I chose you** (John 15:16).

The Apostle Paul adds this: **Faith comes from hearing... the Word of Christ.** (Romans 10:17) And our second lesson declares: **God chose you from the beginning for salvation by the sanctifying work of the Spirit... he called you through our gospel.** 2 Thess. 2:13-14).

So, you see, Jesus was every bit as involved in calling you to follow Him in faith as He was when it came to Moses, Samuel, **Philip** and **Nathanael**.

For no other reason, than His desire to save, He chose you to be His own. **Jesus** called you through the voice of His Gospel message that declares He is your Savior. He sent His Holy Spirit to change our naturally unbelieving hearts so that they would trust in Him alone.

Whether you were brought to faith as an infant by the gospel along with water at the baptismal font, through a friend who like **Philip** did with **Nathanael**, invited you to **come and see** what this Jesus was all about, or if it was during the weeks of a Bible Basics, no matter who the human instruments were, it was Jesus Himself working through His Word to **call you by name**.

It is no accident that you believe in Jesus and have been made an heir of eternal life. It is 100% from start to finish all His doing!

Just think! Out of all real estate in the cosmos, Christ came to claim you as His own. Out of all the billions on earth, the Lord says you so matter to Him that He ruled history so that you would hear and believe the good news that “your sins are forgiven.”

**Called by name.** He knows us. Like He showed to **Nathanael**, Jesus knows everywhere we’ve been and every thought of our hearts. He knows our sin of seeking meaning in all the wrong places and how it has led us to either pride or despair. Yes, He knows all our faults and failings, all our undeserving sin, He knows it better than we ourselves.

And still, He **calls** us by **name** and calls us His own! Oh, to be sure He also calls us to repent – to not hang on to our sin, but to confess and turn from it in shame for what it is. And then He calls us to see His cross where He paid the price for every sin, where He stood between heaven and earth to take our guilt away.

And then He points you to your baptism, where He declared the forgiveness, He won for all has been promised to you as an individual. Yes, in Word and Sacrament, He who died and rose to save us declares heaven stands open to you!

It would be silly to look for meaning and purpose anywhere else than in this God who made the universe, who wears you flesh and blood as your Savior and gives you the joys of eternal life, not because we deserve, but because of His mercy that **called us by name** to be His own.

No sports trophy, no salary, no amount of fame and accomplishment can ever give you more than what Jesus gives you. On the other hand, no amount of suffering, insult, persecution, disappointment, loneliness or sorrow can take away His eternal promises or make you anything less to Him!

None of those things change your true worth. All that matters is that Jesus has **called you by name**. And since He has, that means *you* matter to Him. And what He says about your value to Him matters more than what anyone else can say, including your own feelings! And He says you matter to Him, because He has **called you by name**.

And that means, your life has value and purpose. You have the value of the blood of God's own Son poured on a cross to save you. And you have purpose, as His forgiven child, whatever you do no matter how small or insignificant now has meaning as live in faith and thanks for Him and strive to do all things to His glory!

Yes, He has **called** you by **name**, and placed you into a family, a neighborhood, a workplace, school or community where you get to serve Him by serving your neighbor, where you may also be just like **Philipp** to **Nathanael** and not have to all the answers, but simply invite others to **come and see** this Jesus in His Word – this Jesus you know and follow because He has **called you by name**. Amen.

*Praise the LORD, O my soul, and never forget all the good  
he has done: He is the One who crowns you with mercy  
and compassion. Amen.*