

# West Branch Community of Christ

## Participant Companion Guide – Lectionary Lessons Pilot

January 18, 2014

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time)

Theme: CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME OUT OF [fill in the blank]?  
Racial Justice Day

John 1:43-51

43 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 towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' 48 Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come 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.'

### Central Ideas:

- ***If we will invite people to Christ, they will encounter a Christ who already knows them and invites them to a new way of life in relationship with God.***
- ***Be careful not to judge others based on their backgrounds or based on your own expectations.***
- ***It's OK to struggle and doubt from time to time, but in the end we are invited to mature in our faith by following Jesus, seeing and understanding.***

### Exploring the Scripture

Today's text from the first chapter of John continues telling about the life and ministry of Jesus in stories interwoven with symbolism and meaning. We have already heard through the poetry of the first verses in John's Gospel that Jesus is eternally significant. The author has introduced us to John the Baptist, who in turn identified Jesus as the Lamb of God, and who put Jesus together with his first disciples.

Now we see how the church can grow when people like Phillip respond to their encounters with Christ by inviting others. This might be a good time to talk to your congregation about evangelism. Phillip's enthusiasm for Jesus, who he believes to be the awaited Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures, is met by Nathanael's doubt.

Maybe Nathanael was familiar with the scriptures and was skeptical because Jesus reportedly came from Nazareth, an insignificant town. The religious elite in Jerusalem looked down on the people from the province of Galilee because they were farther away from the religious center in Jerusalem and because many foreigners lived in and traveled through Galilee. But Jesus and his first disciples were from Galilee. Even though he is from Galilee, Nathanael seems to be ranking people's worth within Galilee, placing those from the town of Nazareth at a lower social level. Nathanael might have been a victim of prejudice, but he still managed to carry prejudices against others within Galilee. We might learn from this text to be careful not to judge others based on their background.

Nathanael is converted when Jesus shows he already knows him and saw Nathanael under the fig tree. Jesus showed supernatural insight into Nathanael's character and past. Calling him "an Israelite in who there is no deceit" (v. 47) connected him with the original Jacob (later known as Israel), who spent the night struggling with the angel of God, symbolically wrestling with God. Jesus praises Nathanael saying he has Israel's best qualities and is not deceitful like his ancestor. By doubting Jesus, Nathanael has already, in a sense, wrestled with God like Jacob/Israel did.

The fig tree was a favorite place for students of scripture to sit and study. Jesus' statements show he knew all about Nathanael. Even though Nathanael was now convinced, Jesus said Nathanael still had much to learn. He will "see greater things" (v. 50). Seeing in John's Gospel is about understanding, not just eyesight.

If using today's scripture to talk about evangelism, the speaker might bring out the idea that Phillip extended the invitation to Nathanael but Jesus took over from there. Nathanael wasn't converted by Phillip. Instead, Jesus converted Nathanael, and his further maturation as a disciple would come as he embraced the challenge to follow Jesus, to come and see. In the end it won't be little supernatural demonstrations that cement a relationship with God through Christ; a lifetime of discipleship will.

The passage concludes with Jesus again reminding us of the founder of the people of Israel. Jacob/Israel encountered God in a particular place where angels traveled between heaven and Earth. By the time of Jesus' life on Earth, that place of encounter had become a holy place for the people of Israel. People would go there on pilgrimages. But now, Jesus says to Nathanael and to us, the place to meet God is Jesus himself. Symbolically, the angels will be ascending and descending from Jesus. If we want to encounter God, we need only get to know Christ.