

John 1:45

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (Series B)

Lessons for the Day: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

Finders, Keepers!

January 14, 2018

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

The Greek mathematician Archimedes was one asked by his king to discover whether or not a crown given to him as a gift was pure gold. The problem was that the only way of testing gold’s purity was to smelt it down. But this would destroy the crown and was forbidden by the king. Archimedes puzzled over the problem for some time, until one day, when having a bath, he noticed that the water in the bathtub spilled over when it was displaced by his weight. Suddenly he had the answer that would enable him to test the crown. He would see how much water was displaced by pure gold, and how much was displaced by the crown. If they were different, then the crown was a fake. Archimedes was overjoyed at finding the answer, and in his joy, he couldn’t contain himself—and we are told that he ran home naked, shouting “Eureka, Eureka!” meaning “I have found it! I have found the answer!”

There is a real feeling of joy that comes with the discovery of something important or special. Students writing exams feel like shouting eureka when they suddenly remember an answer that turns the tide on the test. We come across a rare treasure, or something that is important to us, and we want to shout, Eureka! Look what I found! It can happen when you’re cleaning out the attic and find something that you had forgotten all about. It can happen when you find \$100 bill on the street. It can happen when you have looked and looked for something and just when you are ready to give up, you find it. Eureka! I have found it! I found what I was looking for; I have found a treasure I never expected to find.

Eureka! We have found him! That is what Andrew said to his brother Peter after he had talked with Jesus and realised that Jesus was the Messiah. Eureka! That is what Philip says to Nathanael in our text: *“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* What a joyful discovery this was, to find the Saviour that men had longed to see since the fall into sin. They found that Saviour, because the Saviour came and made Himself known to them. Wherever God reveals himself to people, and opens their eyes in faith, they may find Him. When we by faith find the Saviour, we have found the greatest treasure in the world, a treasure that is ours to keep forever.

Mankind had long waited for this joyful moment of discovery recorded in our text. Right from the fall into sin, God had promised to send the Deliverer, who would defeat the power of Satan. When Eve gave birth to her firstborn son, Cain, she said: *“I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”* (Genesis 4:1 - ESV) Luther quite properly translated these words as, “I have the man, the Lord”. Eve believed that her son was the fulfilment of God’s promise to send a Saviour. But we know Cain wasn’t the promised one, and so the search went on. Noah’s father thought that Noah was the promised one, for at Noah’s birth he said: *“Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”* (Genesis 5:29 - ESV) Yet Noah was not the messiah, although mankind continued through him when God judged a sinful world. Moses had told the Israelites: *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”* (Deuteronomy 18:15 - ESV) But that prophet didn’t appear, even as the people came into the promised land. Isaiah said: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6 - ESV) But where was this Prince of Peace? Where was this Wonderful Counsellor? Centuries of longing and prayer and hopeful anticipation went by as people waited for the One whom the prophet said would *bring good news to the poor... bind up the brokenhearted...proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God* (Isaiah 61:1-2 - ESV).

We can imagine, then, the excitement of Andrew and Philip when, at long last, they had found the One people had longed to see for generations. The promised Messiah now lived among his people! When Jesus called Philip to follow Him, Philip came to realize that this was someone special. Only a little time with Jesus- that’s all that was necessary to convince Philip that this was the one they had been looking for. In his joy and excitement, Philip went out and found Nathanael and said to him: *“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*

If ever there was a time to shout “eureka”, this was it. That is just as true today. To find Christ, in the proper Biblical understanding of that, is to find the greatest of all treasures. This past week, people were all excited about the possibility of Oprah Winfrey running for president, because of comments she made when receiving a life-time achievement award at the Golden Globes ceremony. To listen to many people, you would think that Oprah is the messiah that the US needs. Yet nothing could be further from the truth! Even if you think that Oprah has done some good things, they would still be nothing compared to what Jesus Christ has done for all mankind, for all people, throughout all of human history. In Christ we truly find all that we could want; all for which we hope. Jesus says to us: ***the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*** (Luke 19:10 - ESV) ***I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*** (John 10:10 - ESV) ***For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*** (John 3:17 - ESV) All these passages assure us that to know Jesus Christ through faith is to have more than this world can offer. In Christ, we have forgiveness and a life free from sin and its effects that lasts forever. Ponce de Leon is best known for his quest to find the fountain of youth. He never found it, but that hasn't stopped people from looking for it. We want eternal youth. We want eternal life. We look for ways to stay young and healthy. We look for ways to overcome death. We look for it in bottles, in plastic surgery, in medical science. But death will catch up with all people. Sin brings forth death, and, as God tells us so clearly: ***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** (Romans 3:23 - ESV)

But in Christ, we find the One who changes all this. We find the One who gives us life; the One who blesses our days; the One who gives us both a reason for living, and the assurance of a life worth living. Jesus isn't some imaginary hero. He is the very God of heaven and earth who comes to save us. He is the One who was willing to suffer all the pain of our life and to bear all the sins of the world through His own death, so that we might have life in Him. And Jesus lives to bless us with His love. Again and again the Scriptures speak of the compassion of Jesus. We hear of His miracles of healing and of all He did for those who came to Him. We hear His gentle words of forgiveness spoken to Peter, to the woman caught adultery, to the thief on the cross, and to others. We see Him comforting a grieving widow by restoring her son to life, or assuring worried Jairus that his daughter will live. Could anyone hope for a more loving friend; a more compassionate Lord; a more forgiving Saviour?

Is it any wonder, then that Philip should go so quickly to find his friend Nathanael and say to him, “Eureka!”? It is quite true that Philip did not yet understand all the things that the Messiah would do for His people. The Holy Spirit did use the short time Philip had with Jesus to reveal to him that this is the promised Saviour of Scripture. He did not just think that he had found the Messiah, he knew it for a fact. And so he says to Nathanael: ***“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”***

Philip found Christ, because Christ first found Philip and revealed Himself to him. The verse before our text tells us: ***The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”*** (John 1:43 - ESV) It is only when Christ has first found us that we can say, “Eureka! We have found Him!” In the spiritual blindness of our sin we could never find God. In fact, we don't even try to find God because we, in our sinful nature, are enemies of God. Yet Jesus assures us: ***the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*** (Luke 19:10 - ESV) The Lord looks for us, just as He looked for Philip. He finds us and reveals Himself to us so that we may believe in Him. He shows Himself to us in His Word. He shows Himself in the answered prayers. He shows Himself to us in the peace and hope that fill the hearts of the faithful. He shows Himself in the Sacraments. He shows Himself as He forgives our sins. And when the Spirit opens our eyes in faith to see the Lord, we say Eureka! We have found the greatest of all treasures! We have found that hope and life that people keep seeking, but never seem to find.

Sadly, many don't see Jesus as their Saviour. Many are like Nathanael—not all that impressed with Jesus. When Philip goes to his friend with the good news of the Saviour, Nathanael's reaction is one of unbelief. He says: ***“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”*** (John 1:46 - ESV) Thankfully, Nathanael went with His friend, and Jesus revealed Himself to Nathanael. Unfortunately, many refuse to come. Maybe you have invited a friend to church, and they have snubbed you. They don't think that this “Jesus stuff” is for them. God will show Himself, but people refuse to believe in Him. God reaches out to us each and every day, but so often we try to live without Him. He shows us where to find the greatest treasure there is, but we refuse to look. And in doing so we lose the peace, the forgiveness, the freedom that comes from God.

Thankfully, that doesn't stop our God from looking for us. He wants you to find what a life of faith can mean for you. He wants you to find the treasure that He offers you, so that it might be yours forever. He sends His Spirit to you through Word and Sacrament to help you discover what Philip discovered. When Philip says “we have found Him”, that word ‘found’ looks back at the past; to the actual discovery. But it also has an effect and result that lasts into the present. When we found something as children we used to say finders, keepers; losers, weepers. If we found it, it was ours to keep. That is exactly what the word eureka means in our text. Philip has found the Saviour- and he can keep that discovery with him all the time. We have that same promise. Christ will be our treasure forever. All the blessings that are ours in His name continue from the day the Spirit opens

our eyes in faith, so that we may find Him. His love and forgiveness, His peace, His strength—these are things we always have through His grace. Finders keepers, losers weepers. The only weepers are those who refuse to believe in Christ. The things that so many treasure in this world can be lost, or destroyed, or stolen. But this cannot happen to the treasure that is ours in Christ. It belongs to us through faith, a faith that truly finds these blessings in Christ forever. Amen.