

John 1:43-51
Epiphany 2B + January 17, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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"Invasion of Privacy"

Privacy is something which all of us guard very carefully. There are many developments, thoughts, and feelings which we don't wish to share with others for fear they will be misinterpreted. As children grow into adolescence, their need for privacy increases. It should be noted, however that in recent times this need for privacy has been wrongly elevated into a fundamental right. The 1973 Supreme Court decision allowing abortion was based on a supposed right to privacy, which was not mentioned in the Constitution.

Yes, privacy is important, we all have things we wish to be confidential, but privacy is not an absolute right. And think of all the good we would miss if our privacy was always observed. Think how empty life would be if we were totally secluded. There would be no birthday parties, no celebrations of important events, no sharing of important discoveries and joys, no loving support received from parents and those who care deeply about us. There are many circumstances when an invasion of privacy is a great blessing.

Our gospel text for today gives us three examples of blessed invasion of privacy. To begin with, Jesus, as He is gathering His disciples, invades Philip's privacy with the brief command, "Follow me." There was no "excuse me, is this time convenient for you?" There was no emotional or psychological hype to prompt compliance. Philip was not snapped up in a moment of high enthusiasm or in a mood of desperation. He was simply called to active, life-changing obedience, just as we are today. This obedience is not based on our emotional state or our need for comfort, but on Jesus' saving work and His Word of promise.

Then Philip, in the joy of this wonderful invasion of privacy, goes and invades the privacy of Nathanael. Because Jesus had found him and Philip had received Jesus in faith, he could tell his friend, "*We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote.*" So Philip issues the simple invitation, "*Come and see.*" Come and see is still the best method of bringing others to Jesus.

The third invasion of privacy was the most significant. The all-knowing, all-seeing Jesus looked into Nathanael's personal life and analyzes his character, "*Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.*" Jesus invades Nathanael's privacy saying, "*Before Phillip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.*" But what a blessed invasion! It convinces Nathanael that this Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel. Invasion of privacy is a fitting theme for this season of Epiphany. Humankind was locked in an awful privacy of darkness and hopelessness--secluded and separated from God because of the offense of sin. But God didn't allow the world to remain in this private darkness. God invaded the privacy of a sinful earth and startled the world with a glorious birth, sending His Son as the Light of the World, who would reveal the Father's forgiving and saving love.

Jesus promised Nathanael that He would see greater things than the report of him sitting under the fig tree. And certainly, Nathanael and the other disciples did see greater examples of heaven being opened. They saw Jesus use the power that was His from above to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to calm the storms, to preach the good news of the kingdom, and to forgive people of their sins. These works of Jesus were convincing proof that He was the Christ, the promised Messiah sent from God. If people want to know what God in heaven is like, they may see it in Jesus who is God in the flesh. In Jesus, all the power and glory of the Father in heaven is revealed.

We are all a part of God's invasion of privacy. We too were trapped in the private darkness of sin. Thank God that He did invade our hopeless privacy. Just as for Nathanael under the fig tree, for most of us that happened first when we were not even aware of it, at our baptism. God put His triune name on us, gave us a new nature and identity, and made us a member of His body of believers, the Christian church. Being a Christian is not a private matter. When God the Holy Spirit puts faith into our heart and speaks the words of Christ, "Follow Me," we can't go into seclusion or hide in the privacy of our homes. This is a relationship meant to be shared, to be lived out publicly as He enables us.

Jesus knows us; just as he knew Nathanael. He knows our character, our whereabouts, and our actions. That of course is a double message of law and gospel. We can't pretend that our sins and shortcomings are a private secret, known only to us. God knows. If the sin is the sexual immorality spoken of in our Epistle reading, God knows. And since healing forgiveness comes only through repentance, sometimes privacy has to be invaded, sinful situations have to be confronted, law has to be spoken, in order to bring about repentance. But the God whom Jesus revealed also knows our needs and is always ready to provide us with help, healing, and forgiveness from His never-ending supply, always ready to speak words of gospel through His servants.

By the grace of God, our privacy has been lovingly invaded and we have come into a saving relationship with our Lord Jesus. Now the words, "Follow Me," are spoken to us. Jesus wants to use us in extending the invitation, "Come and see," to others. That's what God's Epiphany people do. One found by Christ finds others. Those who have seen the Light of the World share the light.

But still every one of us, myself included, is hesitant to invade others' privacy, even though we have the most wonderful information to share, even though we would be inviting people to a life-giving celebration of God's love. Why is that? An excuse offered quite often is that we don't know what to say, that we don't know Scriptures well enough and we might be embarrassed. Until that weakness is overcome, you can issue Philip's simple invitation--Come and see. After all, people are more affected by a demonstration of caring than by a demonstration of knowledge.

Perhaps the bottom line reason for our hesitance is that we are disobedient to Jesus' call: "Follow Me." We don't want our cherished privacy disturbed. That disobedience can be brought to the foot of the cross and forgiven and then strength received to carry out our calling.

The message of forgiveness and eternal life which we have seen and heard compels us to overcome our hesitance. A Mercedes Benz TV commercial from many years ago showed their car colliding with a concrete wall during a safety test. Someone then asked the company spokesman why they did not enforce their patent on the Mercedes Benz' energy-absorbing car body, a design evidently copied by other companies because of its success. He replied matter-of-factly, "Because some things in life are too important not to share." How true. That applies also to the gospel of salvation, which saves people from something far worse than a car crash. Some things in life are too important not to share.

But often the content of our conversation reveals that we are majoring in minors. We're concerned and passionate about political developments, but unaware of mission developments around the world. We carefully note the wins and losses of our favorite team, but fail to note victories and defeats in the larger battle between the church and Satan. We don't recognize trends in the moral climate, or who is winning the battle for hearts and minds in our country. We worry about and discuss transitory things, but seldom get around to the real stuff of life, the stuff that matters forever. Even in our private conversations with close friends, we don't speak much of our greatest hope.

After the Super Bowl, or the Minnesota Vikings last second win on Sunday, if someone were to say to you, "Wasn't that a great victory?" imagine yourself responding something like this: "You know, Pastor said lately that the greatest victory ever didn't take place in a stadium, or on a court, or on a battlefield. It took place on a hill of execution nearly 2000 years ago as Jesus Christ single-handedly defeated the devil and all the forces of evil. The best part is that He has drafted me to be on His team and we recount and celebrate this victory every Sunday. Come and See."

I'm not sure it will work out that way for you, but whenever you have a natural opportunity, with each other or to someone new, use the enabling power of Christ to say, "Come and see." We bring people to Jesus by gracious invitation, not as the Gospel Gestapo, grabbing them and coercing them to come along. Statistics show that you as friends and family members are generally more effective at invitation than is a pastor.

Sometimes a visit from the pastor can be perceived as a law event, a dreaded invasion of privacy, rather than a sharing of good news or an expression of caring concern. Invasion of privacy may be uncomfortable, but far worse is a person never disturbed in their silent drift away from the Lord.

You and I have had our privacy invaded by the most wonderful message ever proclaimed. The Son of God came into the world to forgive sins and to offer peace and hope to all people. Through the intervening power of His Spirit, we have received those awesome gifts. Now it is our high privilege to enter the lives of others with the simple message, "Come and see." It's an invasion of privacy for which they may be eternally thankful. Amen.