

God chooses bean counters too... A sermon preached on March 19, 2017 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: I CORINTHIANS 1:26-29

JOHN 6:5-7

JOHN 14:1-10

In the first three gospels, this disciple is always listed 5th.

It is believed therefore that he was the leader of the second group of 4 which includes, Bartholomew, Nathanael, John and himself.

This morning's disciple has a Greek name, which means 'lover of horses'

Although this disciple is Jewish we are never given his Hebrew name,

Nor the reason why the Greek name stuck!

Matthew, Mark and Luke only cite his name

It is John who rescues this disciple from narrative side barring.

His name of course is Philip – not to be confused with Philip, the deacon, who in Acts 8 is the main player in the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Although Philip is the first to respond to Jesus' specific call – follow me – the incidents which John records show Philip to be a person completely

out of his element in doing just that – following Jesus.

I do not mean not following in terms of tagging alongside Jesus,

Philip does that without question.

But for some reason, Philip cannot make the connection between Jesus' actions toward individuals as evidence of God through Jesus' actions toward all.

How so?

Let's look at the two lessons from John that Joan read moments ago.

Lessons that show that Philip for all his wanting to follow Jesus, just does not get it!

John 6 – the miraculous and wonderful feeding of the 5,000 from 5 barley loaves and 2 fish
| We have already referred to this story when we spoke about Andrew two weeks ago.

This morning focus on Philip.

Remember Philip is a person of faith,
He believes the Old Testament promise of a Messiah

True to his own convictions, Philip's first response upon meeting Jesus is to do what Andrew does with Simon – come and see – to his best friend – Nathanael.

Good beginning then for Philip.
He's on the right track in following Jesus.

Then comes a “test” and we learn or discover what Philip, the natural man is like

Is that so like Jesus?

The questions he asks that make us think of how deep and faithful to the ways of Jesus we will be in a crunch?

What are we going to do? Who or what are we going to call upon – only our human gifts and skills?

Our natural tendencies – the horizontal?

You remember the story – yes?

A large crowd gathers as Jesus comes ashore after cross the Sea of Galilee.

There are always crowds gathering around Jesus now.

As well, this is close to the high holy day of the Jewish calendar – Passover [the commemoration of the Israelites being set free by Pharaoh – no longer slaves in Egypt, but now free to go with Moses as leader and enter a new and promised land.

As with all high and holy days, this means more people.

Jesus sees the large crowd gathering.

He singles out Philip –**where are WE to buy bread for these people to eat? (vs.5)**

How do you Philip, propose to feed ALL these people?

John tells us that Jesus was testing Philip.

What does Jesus know that we may not at this stage?

Was Jesus testing Philip to find out what he was thinking?

No, for Jesus already knew that

Was Jesus testing Philip by asking him for a plan –

No, John says Jesus already knew what He Himself was going to do.

So the test is for what purpose?

To see what Philip was really like – was he all just fancy, pious talk?

Or was he prepared to really trust in and be dependent upon the Lord.

For by this point, I believe Jesus already sensed that Philip had a natural skill toward providing for the group, organizing local feeding and lodging arrangements.

Like some sort of IC local arrangements

Jesus' test question then reveals that Philip's human tendencies are still overshadowing his faith in God's ability to provide.

As soon as he was asked the question by Jesus, or even before – I can visualize Philip as one of those people who are always thinking along the lines of cost and logistics

“One denarius would buy 12 wheat biscuits.

Barley is cheaper though.

So, with one denarius, we could buy 20 barley biscuits.

And if we get the small biscuits and break them in half.....

Nah, it simply cannot be done
Four thousand barley cakes will not be enough to go around"

While Philip is doing all this calculating, Jesus is watching him – Jesus knows him, as he knows all of us.

Philip's answer to Jesus' question, **Six months wages would not buy enough bits for each of them to get a little (6:7)**

In other words, "Jesus, it cannot be done – we cannot afford it!"

Meanwhile, Andrew brings a boy to Jesus.

The boy has a basket containing 5 barley loaves and two small fish.

Andrew has no idea how this is going to work out, but at least he is thinking of possibilities.

'Bean counter' Philip has said – it cannot be done, because I cannot see how it can be done!

Oh really Philip!

We of course know the rest of the story.

We know there was adequate provision for the day and lots of left overs to be boxed up and taken away-Biblical doggie bag

And we know that in John's gospel, this becomes the second of the signs showing Jesus' power -the first being the miracle of the water into wine at the Cana wedding feast

A feast by the way, at which Philip had been in attendance.

I do not believe Jesus is criticizing Philip's organizational skills and gifts.

Nothing wrong with such a skill in its place – every organization or group needs such people as Philip. No, I think what Jesus is highlighting in this test of Philip is the danger of being obsessed with facts and figures to the point where it is only what we think is possible, becomes what we believe is possible for everyone.

This attitude often evolves into one where the Philip personality – and we all know them – some may even be Philips or Philippa's becomes well-nigh obsessed with identifying reasons things cannot be done, rather than finding ways to do them.

These are the people who put unnecessary governors on visionary dreaming, new things, and change for the whole group because they themselves cannot see possibilities, ways through the woods as it were!

Philip had actually witnessed the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana.

The crowd on the hillside that day was marking Passover – which until the resurrection of Jesus from the dead – was the clearest act and show of

God's power and ability to provide a way through for his people.

But Philip just could not translate the events of Passover to the here and now.
Feeding of the 5,000 could not be done – it's impossible (period)

What Philip forgot to do that day was to include in his decision making –the power of the One he followed as Messiah.

*I believe that each one of us miss so many opportunities to witness the power, provision and presence of the living God in our lives because we listen too much and too often to the inner voices or the voices around us who tell us this or that cannot be done,
Based on solely on the reality of raw facts!*

Hear me; it is always important to make sensible and rational decisions,
To take reasonable course of action.
However, all too often we fail to include the God element into the decision or action
We think only of the horizontal, materialistic, earthbound view
We shortchange or completely forget the vertical
Of the Godly.

Often this is a result not of faithfulness, but forgetfulness,--forgetfulness that God is involved in every aspect of our lives and wants to be involved in more.

I wonder how many opportunities in this life, have we missed, are we missing, will we miss, because we did not factor God into the decision or situation?

Second John lesson – John 14 contains Philip’s reaction to Jesus’ final words to his disciples. It is the well-known scripture passage that begins **Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?(vs.1-2)**

Consider then the setting – Upper Room,
Last Supper,
Last night of Jesus’ earthly ministry,
Eve of the crucifixion.

The formal training of the Twelve officially comes to an end.

It is also the time when some of the disciples sit around the table arguing about who is the greatest.

We will consider one of those disciples next week when we look at James.

Jesus, must have wondered whether the lessons he had taught,

The things the disciples had seen were falling on the rocky ground of a parable he had taught some time ago.

Then there is Philip’s boneheaded, foolish, and for Jesus – heartbreaking – statement that show

the disciples, even in the very presence of Jesus – to be oh so human.

Philip responds to Jesus' deeply moving last address as it were

Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.
(vs.9)

John does not tell us if there were any puzzled and surprised looks on the other disciples' faces' when they hear and absorb what Philip says.

If Mark, the Gospel writer, were telling this story, you can be sure he would add some sort of comment – for the growing obtuseness of the disciples is a theme in his narrative of the life of Jesus.

Here in John Jesus just says,

Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father?" (9)

Philip still does not get it.

For nearly three years, he has heard Jesus teach. He has witnessed firsthand untold number of miracles

He has seen people healed of the worst kind of diseases and deformities.

I wonder, where Philip had's been in all of this.

I wonder, how could Philip of all people, who responded with such enthusiastic faith at the

beginning, be making such a request like this at the end.

I wonder, where is his faith – surface talk only.

Like all the disciples, Philip's life is like a mirror held up to us.

How so?

Many, many, many begin their journey of faith just like Philip – they choose willingly the One who has already chosen them.

They begin to see God's hand and presence not only in the stories of scripture, or in the lives of other people,

But in their own lives.

They come to know that prayer is not some option in the Christian life, but a necessary given.

They begin to experience the sometimes searing and always cleansing light of the gospel in their lives.

They begin to see that God can in fact be trusted to provide for all of our needs and a considerable number of our wants.

Along the way though, they come to listen more often the beguiling the voices of the world – that the possible is only what we can see, touch, feel, hear and do

The God element begins to wane in their decision making.

Rather than being expectant of seeing God in the everyday, the sense of expectancy in this area dims.

And they begin forget or not pay attention to what God has done, is doing and promises to do in their lives and in the lives of everyone.

They become overly cautious, overly fearful because the God of the most impossible situation is no longer an integral part of their daily thinking and life.

That was Philip's blind side and make no mistake, such can happen to any of us.

Look, God does not choose us because we are perfect and stellar people – his choice of the initial 12 is proof of this as is Paul's bullseye reflective comment to the Corinthians (this morning's epistle lesson)

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:^[a] not many of you were wise by human standards,^[b] not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one^[c] might boast in the presence of God.

God chooses each of us – warts, faults, failings and all

Because he always sees the people we can be with
His help, guidance, correction, mercy, grace and
love.

Even Philip came to regain his focus.

Tradition tells us that Philip was greatly used in the
spread of the early church.

He was among the first of the Apostles to suffer
martyrdom by stoning at Heliopolis in Phrygia in
Asia Minor.

But not before multitudes were invited by Philip to
come and see this Jesus.

AMEN.