

**Can Anything Good Come Out of Trinity**

**January 14, 2018**

**John 1:43-51**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the one who meets us right here with His Word of Grace, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” That’s quite a question for Nathaniel to be asking this morning, isn’t it? If you were from Nazareth, you might hear it as quite an insult. Imagine someone you just met asking where you were from. In my case it’s Geneva Ohio. Imagine them responding, “Can anything good come out of Geneva?” I think I’d be pretty offended, wouldn’t you?

Now what if I ask the question a little bit differently. Can anything good come out of Trinity Lutheran Church of Pitsburg Ohio? People might not ask you that question directly, but sometimes, when you talk about your church or consider inviting someone to join you for worship you probably wonder if that’s not exactly what they’re thinking… We have people whose names appear on our membership list, but haven’t worshiped here since I’ve been here. There’s good people sitting at home this morning all across this country, wondering “can anything good come out of me being at church?’ You might even be sitting here every week asking yourself the same question. What good comes from me being here at Trinity Lutheran Church this Sunday or any Sunday. It this relevant to my life? The short answer, Oh yeah, you bet it is!

As our reading starts out Jesus is on his way to Galilee when he comes across Phillip. Two of the disciples Jesus has already called to follow him, Andrew and Peter, were from the same city as Phillip, Bethsaida. Phillip wasn’t out looking for Jesus, Jesus found him. Jesus simply says to Phillip “follow me”. It’s the same way that Jesus comes to us. Think for a minute where we would be without Jesus. Often in the Scriptures, those without faith in Christ are described as “Lost.” Without the forgiveness, life, and salvation that only come through Christ, we would be lost in our sins. We would be eternally separated from God, with the prospect of facing an eternity in the “outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth,” all because of our sinful nature. The good news is we aren’t stuck there in the muck and mire of our sin. Jesus comes into the darkness of sin, and brings the light of His Word to us, he finds us in the darkness of our sins, calling us to follow him and His light. In this place, every week you and I get to hear the good news that Jesus suffered and died to take the punishment our sins rightly deserved. That’s what He did for Phillip, and that’s what He does for us yet today. Right now, through the liturgy we’ve read and sung, through the Scripture readings and prayers, and now, through the preaching of the Word in this sermon, Jesus is calling you to follow him. You are here this morning listening and seeing through ears and eyes of faith, the same call Phillip heard all those years ago. Just as Andrew did, and just as Phillip did, you are here this morning to be in the presence of Christ and to listen to your Savior’s call to follow. Just as he found Phillip and Nathaniel he finds you and brings His Saving Gospel message to you today.

So, Jesus calls Phillip to follow him, and what’s the first thing that Phillip does after Jesus issues the call to follow? He doesn’t throw a big party for himself, because he’s finally found the way, truth, and life. Nor does he keep it to himself. No, the first thing Phillip does is go and find someone he could share his joy with. In the verses that precede our text, we see this same scenario play out with Andrew. Andrew is found by Jesus, Jesus calls Andrew to follow him, and then Andrew goes and tells his brother, Peter, about Jesus, and brings Peter to where Jesus is so that he, too, can hear the Saving Gospel Word of God. Phillip does the same, he goes and finds Nathaniel, and tells Nathaniel about Jesus. The implication is for us to be just like Phillip. Upon hearing such good news of great joy you’d think we’d also be filled with so much excitement that we’d also want to tell someone about this good news.

At this point of the sermon, I think it’s time I ask you a question. Do you consider what Jesus has to offer you in this place week after week to be the most important thing in your life? Note I didn’t ask you if it was one of the most important things, but ***the*** most important thing? Do you consider forgiveness of your sins and the assurance of eternal life in paradise to be the most important thing in your life? Or is it something you can take or leave when something more important comes along? I know that’s a biting question, but your attitude about what Christ is giving in this place affects your response to the saving Gospel message of the Word of God. If we don’t view what Christ has done for us as the most important thing in our lives, if we don’t follow the first commandment by putting God in front of everything else in our lives, our work, our spouses, our children, our money, our possessions, ***everything***, we simply won’t see the need to share that message with anyone else. Phillip was so overjoyed he had found the long-promised Savior, the first thing he did was go and tell someone else about Jesus. Andrew did the same thing. So, what’s stopping so many Christians, even faithful every Sunday attenders, from telling others about Jesus?

When Phillip tells Nathaniel he’s met Jesus, the long-promised Savior, Nathaniel’s responded with his famous question: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth,” probably with good reason. Nazareth is not mentioned at all in the Old Testament. So, Nathaniel probably knew there was no specific reference to the Savior being from there. Nazareth was an insignificant small town with no political respect or influence. It was kind of out there in the middle of nowhere, not unlike many small towns around here. Not only that, but the Messiah is supposed to do some pretty unbelievable things and so he must be from a place with prestige, not some rural town like Pitsburg… er, um… I mean Nazareth. Nothing good has ever come out of that place, why should we believe now the Messiah comes from a place not known for, well, anything?

As you mention Trinity to your friends and acquaintances in your daily lives, you might encounter the same skeptical thoughts. You may have people look to this church, and say, “Can anything good come from Trinity Lutheran Church?” These modern-day Nathaniel’s may have plenty of reasons for saying that. Maybe they have some preconceived notions about church, because they’ve heard some negative things about our church. Maybe they’re uncomfortable with “organized religion” no matter what church it is. Maybe they were once very active in the life of this or another church, and something happened a long time ago to drive them away. Now they look at this place, and say “Can anything good come out of Trinity Lutheran Church?” Some of you sitting in the pews this morning might even be thinking that very thing.

The good news is the answer is an emphatic YES THERE IS! When Nathaniel responded with his question of doubt, did you notice what Phillip said? He didn’t come up with some 500 page doctoral dissertation on the merits of following Jesus. He didn’t argue with Nathaniel until he was blue in the face, he simply invited Nathaniel to “come and see.” Come and see Jesus for yourself. Come listen to him. Come into His presence. And Nathaniel did exactly that. It’s the same thing with us. When we realize this hour or so of worship each Sunday isn’t about what we are doing for God, but what God is doing for us, that Jesus is coming to be present with us through His Word and His Sacrament, to announce to us that our sins are forgiven, and we have the certainty of eternal life, then we too can respond to these objections by simply saying “come and see.” Come and see Jesus for yourself at Trinity on this and every Sunday morning. Come and see him through the scripture readings, the hymns, the sermon, and the sacraments. Sit at His feet, and listen to Him, and hear what He has to say.

This place, right here is where we find Christ, where the cross of Christ is preached and where, through Word and Sacrament, the gates of heaven are opened to us. This is a place where heaven and earth meet, because Christ is present with us when we gather around Word and Sacrament. Christ is without a doubt in our midst today. He is here to open heaven for you. It’s right here, this morning, that our Lord Jesus Christ is calling to you as He did to Phillip and Nathaniel “follow me.” This week, I pray our Lord will put someone in your life, so that you can be their Phillip, you can be the one to tell them what Christ does for you in this place. If my prayer is answered, you may have someone ask you: “Can anything good come out of Trinity?” I already know what my answer is: You better believe it! This is a church where Jesus comes to visit us, and give us the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. That’s the most important thing that can possibly happen in my life this week and I can’t wait to tell everyone I know. How about you? Amen.