

We face the loss of loved ones. May be recent, time may have passed. Church has faced this. Most of us have seen the pictures of the devastation in Haiti. Tragedy in Haiti. (Expand) We can try to make it so those things don't matter to us. We can ask questions to try to make sense of what has happened. Why did this happen? Does God care for us? Can God relate to our pain, hurt and sadness? Our questions can set us adrift and make us feel lost.

People can become lost in pain, grief, literally lost in the rubble in Haiti this week. Our scripture tells us that we are made to be found [by Jesus.] Imagine two friends a boy and a girl after the quake, tired, the girl goes looking for food. The boy who stays is found by an aide worker and given food. Then the boy goes out looking for the girl who went to find food and says I found the one we were looking for, the one with food. The girl then comes towards the aide worker who offers her her favorite kind of candy bar.

This re-conceptualizing of the first part of our scripture reading indicates two ways to become Jesus' disciple, to be found by Jesus in the midst of our need and questioning. We may be someone who Jesus has directly found. We may be someone who has been found by one who knows Jesus. We may believe in him and follow first and then begin to understand more about who he is. We may be more hesitant. We want more information before we believe. We come towards him. There are differences but in both cases Jesus knows us before we 'find' him and an encounter with him changes the course of life. True conversion is an act of God. We can only express wonder at it not explain it.

In John 1 there are two examples of each. First, in the section that we did not read, the two disciples of John follow Jesus upon finding him. Jesus tells them 'Come and see.' (find out more.) One of them went and found his brother Peter, shared what he had learned 'we have found the Messiah', and brought Peter to Jesus. When Peter came near to Jesus, Jesus made it clear that he knew him and Peter believed.

Second, in the section we read, Jesus found Philip and Philip followed. Then Philip learned more about Jesus. This learning can be seen in Philip going to find others for Jesus, going to share who he has found. It may be confusing that Jesus found Philip and then Philip said he found Jesus. Philip was found (encountered by, Jesus), Philip has found (out) who Jesus who found him is. When found by Jesus in this way our questions about our pain and hurts are not immediately answered. All we know is Jesus wants us to live for him, to not go numb or to be lost in meaninglessness. (We will learn about how he gives us life, hope, and salvation. We will learn he is someone worth bringing others to.

Philip tells Nathanael about who he has found. Nathanael hears about who Jesus is, comes to find out more and then believes. Nathanael's first response is skepticism, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth.' There are all sorts of people who themselves or others claimed they were the Messiah. Philip's response was the same Jesus gave to John's disciples. 'Come and see.' Instead of defensiveness or argument, Philip accepted Nathanael's questions and gave him an intriguing invitation.

As a camp counselor I took a group of kids searching for the Big Tree. I remember one complaining I don't want to go hike, I've seen big trees before. At first I tried to tell him how big it is. I said this is so big it took 15 kids holding hands to surround it. That didn't make much of an impression. I realized I didn't need to argue with him. Instead I said why don't you come and see for yourself.

Often we try to answer all of others' questions or feel that all our questions must be answered to follow Jesus. Skepticism can be healthy. It is not wrong or unfaithful to begin with questions, to bring questions to God, or to let others bring questions to God. Questions open us to discovery.

But skepticism and doubt can't have the last word or we will always be lost. If we form an opinion of someone that is negative we will look skeptically at anything he does that may be good. We will find a way to see it in a negative light. (This is all a set up, a big practical joke between Jesus and Philip to get Nathanael to believe he is the Son of God.) In regards to finding more out about Jesus, Nathanael must suspend his skepticism so he can have the opportunity to learn. Nathanael does this. He opens himself by coming to see Jesus though Jesus could be a fake.

We need to come towards Jesus. We won't encounter him (even if he is right there with us) if we let our doubt and questions keep us from hearing what he says. We won't encounter him if we let our lack of answers keep us from exploring if what someone says about him is true. We won't encounter him if we let our loss blind us to seeing how he brings life.

When we come towards Jesus, he pierces skepticism and brings faith. Jesus speaks truth about Nathanael. I know you are a true Israelite. I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you. (Being under the fig tree is an idiom referring to reading scripture.) It was enough for Nathanael that Jesus had seen and really known him before he was invited to meet Jesus. All his questions did not have to be answered. He responded, proclaiming aloud belief.

Jesus knows us. Jesus does bring answers. Jesus is more than what Philip and Nathanael know even as they follow and proclaim faith. Jesus is more than all the claims made in his favor. Jesus is not just an earthly king. In him is the meeting place of heaven and earth. Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, you will see

heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Jesus connects us to God.

The glory of God comes to us and we are lifted up to heaven in our confusion, when our questions are not answered, when we feel lost. All of us with our various and confused efforts to find out who God is can see in the human Jesus the presence and glory of God.

All who live in constant companionship with Jesus know God. We are the Lord’s; in life and in death. Romans 14:7-8 articulates our certain hope. “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord, so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”

When we are lost we can know that Jesus wants to find us. When we find him we bring others to be found by him. Come and see.