

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John's Gospel. It is not appointed to be read on any Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. In both LW and LSB, the material immediately preceding this material (Peter and Andrew, 29-42a) is the text appointed for Epiphany 2A. The material immediately after it (Wedding at Cana, 2:1-11) is read on Epiphany 2C.

This text does not introduce Andrew. By way of introduction, it may be well to review that material from last year, with a particular emphasis on the calling of Andrew and of Peter. Such a review would also serve to set the context for what happens here and to add continuity. A good storyteller – and we want to be that – will do that for the listener.

The Apostle John begins his book with information about Jesus and John, and then brings them together at His Baptism. In vv. 29, 35, and here in v. 43 he talks about “the next day.” In John 2:1, speaking of the wedding feast at Cana, he talks about “the third day,” that is three days from the day last mentioned, perhaps travel time from Bethany to Cana.

One of the major components of a good story is interesting characters. The Apostles are interesting people – so is Jesus – and people will be interested in listening to somebody talk about them. On a more basic level, like any good author, make sure that your hearer knows who the characters in the story are, and tell them a little bit about each of them.

You can add information about the characters as this story plays out. As far as the nuts and bolts of character development, sometimes authors will give you all the information about a character at one time, like John Grisham does, but sometimes it's better to mete that kind of information out a little bit at a time, like Clancy used to do before he died.

As usual, keep the Johns straight. I will refer to John A (the Apostle) and John B (the Baptizer) in teaching. You probably already knew that the Apostle Philip in this pericope is different from the Philip the Evangelist who we meet in the Acts of the Apostles, but maybe your hearer doesn't. Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person in the NT.

The WIK articles on the Apostles are very good, tending to act as compilers rather than scholarly resources, and they relate a lot of basic information in one place and give us an idea of what we know, and what we don't know, about each of these men. *The Master's Men* by William Barclay is a very thorough collection of bios of each of the Apostles.

Barclay talks a lot about Andrew. He says that John is the only writer who mentions Andrew, and the other Gospels don't. He says that Andrew "was characteristically the man who was prepared to take second place," pointing out that he is often referred to as "Peter's brother," and notes that he is the odd man out of the Peter, James, and John Trio.

He continues,

Andrew is characteristically the man who was always introducing others to Jesus. There are only three times in the gospel story when Andrew is brought into the centre of the stage. There is this incident here, in which Andrew brings Peter to Jesus. There is the incident in *John 6:8,9* when Andrew brought to Jesus the boy with the five loaves and two small fishes. And there is the incident in *John 12:22* when Andrew brought the inquiring Greeks into the presence of Jesus. It was Andrew's great joy to bring others to Jesus (*Daily Study Bible*).

In reading through this exchange, I can't help but detect the unmistakable tone of Guy Banter. I don't see commentaries talking about things like that, but why would we be surprised if some of that is going on with guys? Somehow, we think that Jesus and His Merry Band of males are robotic spiritual nerds devoid of a sense of humor or machismo.

Often, they come across as at least boring and maybe not even fully human. But they are human, like us. Even Jesus was fully human, as well as being fully God, and He was a man, but we shouldn't expect Him to act like one? Unless there's something inherently sinful in Guy Banter and trash talking, of course we would expect that from Jesus.

In a time and place like ours, when beef, pork, and chicken are the main sources of protein – that's a new thing – it's hard to imagine what an immense industry fishing was in that time and place. Fish was almost the only source of protein. The north shore of the Sea of Galilee seems to have been an area with a high concentration of fish producers.

We know that Peter and Andrew, the other principles in the story, were fishermen. We also know that twins James and John, the writer of this book, were fishers too. If, in fact, they were all engaged in the fishing business, it's not a stretch to think that they may have had some acquaintance one with another. Almost certainly they knew each other well.

In fact, the dialogue, as well as the encounter itself, suggest as much. Much is often made about the diversity of the Apostles, but here we see that at least six of them lived in the same area, in all likelihood knew each other, or at least knew of each other, and at least four of those six, and maybe all of them, were fishermen, and some owned boats.

After He was baptized by John, Jesus continued to hang out in Baptism Central, John continues to talk about Jesus, and we can now add to the preaching of John what he has “witnessed” when that Baptism took place. In v. 35 we are told that John was standing with “two of his disciples,” and that He proclaimed to them Jesus as “the Lamb of God.”

From there, one thing led to another, and the two disciples, later identified as brothers Andrew and Peter, become followers of Jesus. Most people are not aware that John had disciples, and if you mention this, some of them may come out of church and say, “I didn’t know that” as they move through the shaking line. That would be a good thing.

We learn at seminary to keep preach the Law and the Gospel and that the Gospel should predominate and be last and foremost in the sermon. It would be easy to preach a Law-oriented Reformed sermon on this text. You would simply point out that these men followed Jesus, etc. and that you should be like them and follow Jesus. That was easy.

The problem, of course, is that the natural man wants to follow the Cubs or the Iowa Hawkeyes or a certain career path or pleasure or wealth or anything *but* Jesus. To keep the Gospel focus in our preaching, concentrate more on the fact that Jesus chose these men and you (Gospel) and nothing on the fact that they followed Him, and so should you.

Textual Notes

43. John tells us the incident he is about to relate to us happened on “Τῇ ἐπαύριον – the next day.” This is the third of three next days all in a row here, and after this comes “on the third day” (2:1), which is the day of turning water into wine at Cana. The movement is from Bethany Beyond the Jordan to Galilee, specifically to Cana for the wedding.

He has been at Bethany east of the Jordan River, where John B was doing what John B do, and after two days there, Jesus “ἠθέλησεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν – wanted to go into Galilee.” The main verb, “ἠθέλησεν – He wanted,” is the aorist active indicative form of a very common word, one usually translated “wanted,” or “willed,” or “desired.”

RSV renders it “decided,” indicating a deliberate act, which it was. It may not seem like a big deal, and maybe it isn’t, but as a matter of fact, without telling us exactly why, John tells us that Jesus went to Galilee because He wanted to be there, and that His going was not a random act or the product of His aimlessly wandering about, but intentional.

Later, we find out that He was going to Cana, Galilee, to go to a wedding. We will find out that Jesus and His entourage were invited to the wedding (2:2), so His going there was for that reason. I don’t think He knew they were going to run out of wine – you can’t let that happen – and when they did, it was His mother who brought Him into it.

When she brought the wine problem to Him, He demurred, telling her His time had not yet come. Mary told the servants to do what He told them to do, and He ends up making

wine from water. That also “the first miracle, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed,” was deliberate, but it does not seem to have been one planned in advance.

John was baptizing in the Bethany that is located just to the east of the Jordan River. Just to the west, across the River Jordan, lies the geographical region of Galilee, whose geographical borders are somewhat fluid on the north and south, but on the east are set at the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea.

Perhaps what is most noteworthy about the intended destination of Jesus is where He does *not* go. He doesn’t go and doesn’t want to go to Judea, which would have been to the south. As it turns out, He spends most of His time in Galilee, the veritable religious hinterlands of Palestine, and very little of it in Judea, the geographical center of Judaism.

In addition, we note that Jesus made this decision to go to Galilee the day after He had called Peter and Andrew, the day after they had accepted the invitation, and before He likewise called Philip and Nathanael. It says that Jesus “εὕρίσκει Φίλιππον – found Phillip,” an active verb, meaning that He deliberately looked for Phillip and found him.

This is the first mention of Phillip. Why did Jesus specifically choose Phillip? Jesus chose Phillip for the same reason why God chose Abraham, and Peter and Andrew, and you and me, and the rest of us. There is nothing indicated about Phillip – or the rest of the Twelve – that would make them more or less qualified to be what Jesus made them.

Jesus deliberately sought out Phillip “καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Ἀκολούθει μοι – and He said to him, ‘follow me.’” The verb is *ακολουθεῖ*, is a present active imperative, a command with emphasis on person, rather than on action. Following Jesus is to become part and parcel of who Phillip was and is as a person, and in fact it does become just that.

Phillip the Apostle is to be distinguished from Phillip the Evangelist (Acts 6:5 et al), who is a different person. This Phillip is mentioned several times in John’s Gospel, and he is thought to have worked in Asia Minor and the Middle East and to have been martyred at the city of Hieropolis in modern-day Turkey. His feast day, along with James, is May 1.

44. John now tells us that Phillip was “ἀπὸ Βηθσαϊδά – from Bethsaida,” a town that no longer actually exists, and we’re not exactly sure where it was, but John tells us that it is also “τῆς πόλεως Ἀνδρέου καὶ Πέτρου – the city of Andrew and Peter,” who were fishermen who lived in Capernaum, whose ruins are still there and currently being dug.

The author of this text would have known well these towns, since he and his brother James were from the same area; they worked out of the city of Capernaum. Peter, Andrew, James and John all lived in and worked out of Capernaum. When John talks of Bethsaida as the city of Andrew and Peter, he probably means that was their hometown.

I haven’t actually lived in Milan for forty years, and likely I will never live there again, but it will always be my hometown, and I go there often, and it is very familiar. One can

well imagine these brothers Peter and Andrew moving to Capernaum, on the sea, to get into the fishing business. They bought a fishing boat and lived out The American Dream.

James and John are not connected with any place except for Capernaum. Perhaps their father Zebedee or his father before had moved to Capernaum, on the sea, to get into the fishing business. The bottom line here is that Phillip likely knew Peter and Andrew, and he may even have worked for them. Other Bible Scholars say he probably had a trade.

45. Jesus found Phillip, then “εὕρισκει Φίλιππος τὸν Ναθαναὴλ – Phillip finds Nathanael, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ - and says to him,” what they have found. Nathanael is from Cana (21:2). Phillip tells him that “Ὅν ἔγραψεν Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ καὶ οἱ προφῆται εὐρήκαμεν – we have found the one spoken written in Moses and the Prophets;” i.e. the Christ or Messiah.

The writings of Moses are the first five books of the OT, (known as Torah or Pentateuch), and the Prophets are all the rest. They have found (perfect tense) The One of whom the OT speaks, “Ἰησοῦν υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ – Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth,” reflecting their belief that this very Jesus is to be identified with that Christ.

46. Nathanael’s response to Phillip’s good news is to focus not on Jesus, but on Nazareth, and to ask famously and rhetorically, “Ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δύναται τι ἀγαθὸν εἶναι – from Nazareth is any good thing to be?” It seems like an odd statement to make. It would appear that Nathanael has a familiarity with Nazareth, and the town is of some repute.

A short walk of six miles – an hour by foot – separates Cana from Nazareth. In Mark (6:6) we find that Jesus was unable because of their lack of faith to do much miraculous healing at Nazareth, and He “marveled because of their unbelief.” That unbelief was a very active unbelief; twice He came to synagogue there, and twice they drove Him out.

The road to Nazareth was a road to nowhere, and you would not have gone to Nazareth unless it was your final destination, and why would you have occasion to go there? The town is given no mention in the OT, or anywhere else (WIK, *Jewish Encyclopedia*), for that matter. It was a small, obscure place that was inhabited almost exclusively by Jews.

While it is not nearly as likely that people went from there, or here, to Nazareth, it is quite conceivable that residents of Nazareth would have come up to this area to do business in one or more of the trading cities, and if Nathaniel was a fisherman, then he had likely had contact with people from a wide area, including people from Nazareth.

As I mentally make the rounds of the towns, cities, and wide spots in the road around here, I note that I have distinct impressions about all of them. We used to refer to one wide spot in the road not far from here as “dog town,” and a small, old mining town that used to be something seems to be a place where unemployed child molesters tend to live.

Some of the five Quad Cities are snobbier than others, some are “blue collar” towns, some “hoity toity,” towns, and there are areas where you will automatically lock your

doors, even in the day. Growing up, we lived on the nicest street, located “on the hill” in my hometown, which isn’t saying much about it, and that perception is still there today.

All of these caricatures of places are just that, as no doubt Nate’s seemingly harsh or at least unflattering judgment of Nazareth and Nazarenes was part caricature, which always carry a grain of truth. We ought then to consider his statement to be made up of such things as; truth, hyperbole, good-natured ribbing, and perhaps a good dose of snobbiness.

Perhaps the statement is simply an idiom, and the problem with idiom is that idioms are often hard to determine from several cultures, years, and time zones away, and all of them in the Bible are like that. Bullinger calls Nathanael’s statement a “Paroemia” or “Proverb,” a common saying that likely contains at least something of that kernel of truth.

Phillip’s response to Nathanael’s “any good thing” is to invite him to “Ἔρχου καὶ ἴδε – come and see,” and he does. The Imperative mood usually means command, but it can mean an invitation, and here we see a clear example of Imperative as invitation. Far from commanding him, Phillip is inviting Nathanael to come and see what he’s talking about.

47. Jesus sees Nathanael coming, and this sounds a lot like the continuation of fisherman banter, “Ἴδε ἀληθῶς Ἰσραηλείτης, ἐν ᾧ δόλος οὐκ ἔστιν – look, a true Israelite, in whom deceit is not.” The word rendered deceit is the word for bait, which is all about deceit. Nathanael has spoken plainly about things from Nazareth, duly noted by the Nazarene.

He calls Nathanael a “true Israelite,” and we recall the origins of that moniker. In a dream, Jacob sees a ladder, and angels going up and down the ladder (Genesis 28: 12ff.). Shortly after that, (32:22ff.), we find Jacob fighting with the Lord. Jacob demands a blessing. That’s when God changed Jacob’s name to Israel – one who fights with God.

So, Jesus tells the (probably) fisherman who has just trash talked His hometown, the one to whom He had just referred as an “Israelite,” that the fisherman doesn’t have any bait. John likes the Figure of Speech known as “double entendre,” (“Judas went out, and it was dark,” for example), and if Nathanael is a fisherman, then that’s what’s going on here.

Nate has no bait, and he is an honest man in an industry where not every man is. Perhaps this too was an idiom or a common proverb. A thing can be, and often is both a double entendre *and* an idiom., and the problem with identifying idiom in the here and now from there and then remains. We are often unsure of what a particular idiom meant back then.

48. Nathanael then asks Jesus, “Πόθεν με γινώσκεις; ἀπεκρίθη – from where do you know me?” I have often found myself asking that question of people who I don’t know, but who somehow seem to know me. Many people sit there and listen to me, and they only have to remember one person. Me, on the other hand, I have to remember many.

That wasn’t exactly the problem here; “Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Πρὸ τοῦ σε Φίλιππον φωνῆσαι ὄντα ὑπὸ τὴν συκῆν εἰδόν σε.before – Jesus said to him, ‘before Philip called

you, being under the fig tree, I saw you.” According to Robertson, to be “under a fig tree” was a common idiom (WP, p. 30) used to refer to one who was studying the Bible.

The spiritual American Christian might say, “I’m getting into the Word,” or in a broader sense, “I’m hitting the books pretty hard.” At what point was Nathanael doing that? He may have been studying the OT before Phillip told him that the Christ had been found. Less likely – from the text – the telling came first and the reading next; to check it out.

49. As is often the case with bantering, you kid around, and then it’s time to get serious, and the way Nathanael does that is to call Jesus “Ραββεῖ, σὺ εἶ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, σὺ Βασιλεὺς εἶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ – Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.” Rabbi,” a term used not of every teacher but of one respected for his intellect and the like.

Even more to the point, the term is only directed at the teacher who is noted for His wisdom and His ability to communicate those things. It is not a term that was used of the teachers in the Temple from whom the boy Jesus was learning, for example. It would be a term that ought to be roughly equivalent to our “reverend,” or the RC “monsignor.”

He then calls Him “the Son of God,” something to which John the Baptizer has earlier publicly born witness (v. 34), and which Nathanael did and even now does clearly regard as a true statement. It is a messianic term, as is the term “The King of Israel,” the third thing that Nate says here about Jesus. What a wonderful confession of faith this is!

Based mostly on the verse that has him reading his Bible, Bible Scholars speculate as to whether Nate might have been a highly educated man. It’s an argument mostly from silence, which does not necessarily invalidate the thesis, but here we see that he at least knew the basics of Messianic Theology. Probably knowledge of that kind was common.

50. Jesus seems to think that Nathanael thought what he thought and confessed about Him because He had seen him under the fig tree. If my Christological instincts are correct, if that’s what Jesus thought, then that is what it was. Either that, or He is returning to the previous bantering; “oh, you think it was a big deal for me to see you?”

But I don’t think so. Jesus then tells Nathanael “μείζω τούτων ὄψηγοι – you will see greater things than these.” Like what? Well, it won’t be long before Nathanael sees Jesus change water into wine at Cana, and from there he will observe three years’ of various and sundry miracles, culminating in the Resurrection and Ascension. But first...

51. But first, “Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὄψεσθε τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεφγότα καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναβαίνοντας καὶ καταβαίνοντας ἐπὶ τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου – truly, truly, I say to you (pl), you (pl) will see the heavens open up and the angels of God descending and ascending on the Son of Man.” Daniel (7:13) had talked about such a thing.

It also sounds very much like that very eventful trip Jacob had taken, the one where angels are ascending and descending, and especially in the second encounter we find the

Pre-Incarnate Christ interacting in a very personal manner with Jacob. But exactly when is it going to be that these men will see that thing? Probably not this side of the Last Day.

He begins the sentence with a double “ἀμην – amen,” to let Nathaneal know that He should really listen to this. The bantering is done. How do you know that? The same way you know when you are bantering with somebody about something, and it’s time for the bantering to stop, and one gets serious, then the other gets serious. That’s how.

He then talks about the “opening of heaven,” which is always a good thing, and the phrase is an indication that God is about to bestow good things on man, like Daniel said. In Matthew (3:16), we saw “the heavens opened” at the Baptism of Jesus. In this case, when the heavens open, it is “angels” that will descend and ascend on the Son of Man.

The noun is “ἀγγέλους - angels” and the two verbs “ascending” and “descending” are present active participles. What form did these angels (messengers) take? Jesus says to Nathanael that “you(pl) will see,” a future indicative middle, second person plural, it means that at some time in the future they would all see this descending and ascending.

The use of the verb *οράω*, not *βλέπω*, emphasizes perception, the actual seeing with their actual eyes of this coming down and going up. Adam Clarke calls the descent and ascent of these angels “an assurance of the perpetual intercourse” between God and man, which is a great turn of phrase, but not one that I would use from the pulpit in this millennium.

Robertson also uses the word “intercourse,” and I wonder if we aren’t overthinking this thing. The Commentators can’t seem to get Jacob’s Ladder out of their collective minds, where there was intercourse between the angels and God’s Creation. We note that The Second Person of the Trinity was there, in heaven, but He did not get onto the ladder.

Later on, John (13:3) has Jesus talking about the Son of Man descending out of and ascending into heaven, but the ordering is different. The angels are here placed first on the earth, then ascending into heaven, then descending upon the Son of Man, and when does that happen? When does that happen so that it is in the seeing of Nathanael?

Could this be an apostolic reference to Nathanael, who will become an Apostle? The angels = messengers of God, The Apostles who proclaim the Word will die and ascend into heaven, but not before they wrote it down. The Word of God will then descend to those who follow them as messengers = Pastors who are in the selfsame Apostolic Office.

Augustine puts it like this,

Good preachers who preach Christ are like angels of God; that is, they ascend and descend on the Son of Man...Take for instance Paul, who ascended to the third heaven...and descended so far that he even gave milk to babies...Take for instance the father who is well skilled in speaking, who is such an orator that the forum resounds with his eloquence...if he has a little son, on his return home he puts aside the

forensic eloquence to which he had ascended and in child's language descends to this little one...If the Lord himself ascended and descended, it is evident that his preachers ascend by imitation and descend by preaching.

Hymns

Come Follow Me, the Savior Spake LSB 688

The Church's One Foundation – LSB 644

By All Your Saints in Warfare – LSB 518, vv. 1, 16, 23, 3

Church of God, Elect and Glorious – LSB 646

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