The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Several observances this weekend serve to remind us not to make negative assumptions about people. National Martin Luther King holiday is reminder not to prejudge what others deserve or can do because of their race or color. Life Sunday today is a reminder not to discount or devalue what one might do or the life they deserve because of their physical condition or disability. History is full of examples of great accomplishments by those who in infancy or childhood would have seemed so disadvantaged by situation or personal defects that they would never amount to anything. Today’s text is a reminder not to assume low expectations of others but also of ourselves which actually expose low expectations of what God can do.
It looks like Jesus just walks up to a guy named Philip and out of the blue says “follow me.” Would you expect someone to just do that? Maybe not. But John hints that there is more going on behind the scenes than is apparent on the surface.

In verses before this, John the Baptist is pointing to Jesus. One of his disciples, Andrew, ends up following Jesus. Andrew tells brother, Simon, about him & he does too. Jesus seems to already know about Simon too. Right off he gives him a new name, Peter, meaning rock. Text tells us Philip is from the same town as Andrew & Peter. Would you think they say nothing to him about Jesus?

This is one of very few references in the Bible to Philip. Another is when people come to him & want to meet Jesus. But first he goes off and finds Andrew, then together they take the others to Jesus.

There is a pattern here. On one hand it looks like Philip is one of those people who is either so unsure of himself or so social that he can’t do anything just by himself. Maybe you wouldn’t expect one like this to become much of a leader, but Jesus does.

Another side of this pattern shows that he is indeed a leader. From very beginning, he & Andrew lead others to Jesus. He tells Nathaniel: We have found Jesus, although actually it was Jesus who found him. So, when Jesus says, “Follow me,” & he goes for Nathaniel he is following Jesus. He is following his example of going and finding and calling.

Throughout this Epiphany season, we are reminded that this is part of being Jesus’ disciples for us as well. Living faith leads us to want other to have this life too. There are some families that have not yet “had their Christmas” meaning they have not yet opened presents together to reveal what they got. The real gift of Christmas is Jesus but there are many who have still not had this gift revealed to them.

We may hesitate to follow Jesus this way because we have low expectations of ourselves or what will happen. But as Jesus’ own words, “Follow me” cause it to happen, the gift of faith comes from Jesus himself.
NATHANIEL DOUBTS GOOD COMING FROM LOWLINESS

46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

Nathaniel’s initial sour reply might suggest he is a grouch. Jesus puts it positively: In him there is no deceit.

He doesn’t try to hide anything

but just blurts out what he thinks.

But maybe, as with Philip, there is more to his story.

He is from Cana in Galilee, just over ridge from Nazareth.

Maybe it was perennial arch rival Cana looked down on,
or maybe it really was a second rate place,
or maybe he had left Cana himself because
there wasn’t much good in any of these little hick towns.

Have you ever seen one of those super magnified pictures
where you are try to guess what it is?

Sometimes when you are too close to something
it is hard to see it clearly, in perspective.

Maybe that was Nathaniel’s problem.

Or maybe Nathaniel had low expectations

because he had been disappointed before.
Why would Philip seek Nathaniel to tell him about Jesus?

Maybe he knew he was interested in the Messiah.

Jesus describes Nathaniel as sitting under a fig tree.

Prophet Micah predicts when God saves his people,
everyone will sit under his own fig tree.

“Sitting under a fig tree” became a Jewish expression

that was slang for sitting and reading the Bible.

Nathaniel may have studied prophesies of the Messiah.

Maybe, under that fig tree he had once asked God
to reveal the truth to him and to send the Messiah.

Being “from Cana” was another Jewish slang expression

for being a Zealot fighting the Roman occupation.

because they thought that was how

God’s Messianic kingdom would finally come.
Nathaniel may have once been a Zealot, fighting losing battle, but was disillusioned with that whole Messianic idea. Notice Philips approach to his friend. He doesn’t argue, or get defensive or offended by his rude reply but simply says, “Come and see” Come along with me and let Jesus himself show you. There are those today who may reject what God offers them because of low expectations. What good can come from someone born with disabilities? or in one who becomes severely injured or disabled? What good can come from an unintended pregnancy or one that may end up being disabled or a burden on one who cannot care for it? What good can come from enduring a terminal disease? What good can come from one whose mind seems to have gone before their body? When one is in the middle of a situation like this, It is possible to be so close to it that it is hard to see how to make any sense out of it. Or one can have such a low opinion of where one is coming from oneself and so not expect much from another. One can have had hopes and expectations and efforts disappointed and so be totally disillusioned with life. What can we say to someone like this? One thing we can say is “Come and see” It can make a big difference to see an ultrasound and see a real baby and not just a blob. See what the love & joy of those with mental disabilities. See the accomplishments of those with other handicaps. See the life that is still precious to those who suffer. Come and meet Jesus who knows and sees all, who says to Nathaniel, I saw & heard you before your realized it, when you were asking God to show you the truth when you were disappointed with your own efforts. Come meet Jesus who saw you and knew you & each one before we were born and had good plans for us. Jesus knew what difficulties and suffering we would have before it happened and knows how to help us. Jesus knows what we are like, including all our faults and still calls us to follow him because he knows how he will use us.
JESUS SHOWS WHAT GOOD COMES FROM HEAVEN

Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Philip sees Jesus as a man from Nazareth, the son of Joseph, yet does recognizes him as the one written about in the law of Moses and in the prophets. the one who fulfills all God’s commandments we fail to keep and who keeps all God’s promises to help his people with healing and rescue from their enemies.

Then, when Jesus reveals his amazing knowledge of Nathaniel, he realizes he is not just a man who can do that. He is the son of God himself, the ruler of God’s people who has come to us in person. He is the king of Israel who will free us from our enemies, not just human powers but the devil and death itself not by just by helping us fight back but by fighting and w inning the victory for us.

Jesus says we will see even more than that. Not only is he God who has come to be with us and to help us with all our struggles and suffering here but he opens up heaven for us. He is the portal to heaven that Jacob saw when he saw angels ascending & descending to him. He is the Son of Man Daniel saw who presided over the final judgment and welcomed people to eternal life.

Philip and Nathaniel went on to see Jesus die on the cross and once again they were disappointed and wondered what good could come of that until Jesus rose again and showed that this suffering is itself the way he defeated sin, death and the devil. The went on to see Jesus ascending into heaven, welcomed by his holy angels. And again may have felt disappointed and alone until angels came to say he will come take us there too.
We now are invited to follow Jesus
   and also to bring others to come and see
       how he reveals his wisdom in his word.
   How he continues to bring good out of suffering in our lives.
   How he continues to give life and preserve life
       so that each one can be brought to faith and kept in faith
           until he opens up heaven and takes us there also,
               free from all difficulty, disability & suffering
   This is what he calls us to follow him to

PHILIP SHOWS WHAT COMES FROM JESUS’ CALLING
   His calling causes us to follow him in a way
       that includes going to invite others to come along
           even when it may seem no good may come of it.

NATHANIEL DOUBTS GOOD COMING FROM LOWLINESS
   how a messiah can come from lowly Nazareth,
       and how good can come after discouragements.
   Just as we are invited to see how God can bring good
       even out of troubles and suffering in our lives.

JESUS SHOWS WHAT GOOD COMES FROM HEAVEN
   He has come down to fulfill everything where we fail,
       to forgive and take away our faults
   and by his suffering and death to open up heaven
       so that we have not just valuable life here
           but priceless life forever.