

January 17, 2021 -- Christ the Rock, Farmington, NM

Philip -- a Practical Man Who Counted the Costs

Text: John 1:43-51

Today I'd like us to focus our attention on the Apostle Philip, one of the less colorful of Jesus' 12 disciples. A Hebrew with a Greek name, he came from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. He was steady, prone to keep himself within the limits of careful calculation and common sense. You can read the entire Bible and walk away feeling as if you don't know him. Yet study carefully the four times Philip speaks in the Bible, and a personality emerges. We end up liking him perhaps because he was like so many of us today. He was Mr. Average Christian.

Today I'd like you to meet **PHILIP -- A PRACTICAL MAN WHO COUNTED THE COSTS**. First we will examine the **EVIDENCE OF HIS PRACTICAL APPROACH TO THINGS** and then see the **RESULTS BECAUSE JESUS BLESSED HIS FRUITS OF FAITH**.

Philip is a name on the list, a face in the crowd among the original 12 disciples. You may question me on that because you remember the incident in Acts 8, where the Ethiopian government official was riding along in his chariot and reading from the Prophet Isaiah. Philip approached him, asked if he understood what he was reading, and then explained to him that Isaiah was writing about the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Isaiah was saying that "all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way (we all are sinners and deserve God's punishment, but Isaiah goes on) God has laid on him -- on the Savior -- the iniquity of us all." Philip explained that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins -- and rose on Easter as proof that we now are justified and will rise from the grave also to eternal life in Heaven. Do you remember the Ethiopian's reaction? "Here's water, can I be baptized?" Philip immediately baptized him. We remember this well-known incident in the Bible, but that Philip was not Philip the disciple and apostle. That was Philip the Evangelist, Philip the Gospel Preacher. That Philip was one of the 7 deacons elected to handle business matters in the Jerusalem congregation. There's an application for our congregation's leaders. Philip the Evangelist was not the pastor; he was a member of the church council with the responsibility of overseeing food distribution to the poor, yet he also was eager and active in telling others about Jesus. But forget about Philip the Evangelist. We are studying Philip the Apostle -- a different person.

Perhaps the characteristic of practicality was ingrained in Philip from littlest on by his parents. Even though he was Jewish living in a Jewish town, Philip's parents had given him a Greek name -- and the name of the current Roman ruler no less, Philip the Tetrarch. "Let's be practical," his parents may have thought. "We're under Roman rule; Greek is the language of the empire; Philip is our governor. Besides the Tetrarch is a pretty good ruler; he treats us fairly. Let's forget all this fanatical Jewish nationalism and be practical. It makes sense to get along."

Whether practicality was ingrained in him by his parents or not, it certainly was present in his adult life. The disciple Philip speaks only four times in the Bible. And all four give evidence of a tendency to be a practical man who counted the costs.

In today's Gospel reading we heard about Philip's first encounter with Jesus on the day after Jesus had called Andrew and Peter to be his first followers. Jesus found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." This was one time that Philip did not hesitate. He gathered his belongings and set out with Jesus. The next step was inevitable. He sought out his friend, Nathanael-Bartholomew – Nathaniel, son of Tholomeus. "We have discovered him," Philip cried, "of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Notice that Philip was a good Lutheran. He takes Nathanael right to the Bible and bases his testimony and his faith on the Scriptures -- we have found the Savior about whose coming the Old Testament writers Moses and the Prophets spoke.

Nathanael laughed when he heard the word Nazareth. "Can anything good," he said, "come out of Nazareth?" Perhaps Philip was taken aback by his friend's scorn and ridicule. But only for a moment, and then he responded in his practical way: "Come and See" for yourself.

We too have the desire to be missionaries, sharing the Savior with others. Philip shows us a simple, practical plan for our mission efforts -- invite them to "Come and see." We may not be able to answer all questions people may ask. We may not be able to talk down all their objections. But we can say: "I receive peace or joy or encouragement or strength from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Come with me next Sunday morning and share an hour of worship with me. Come with me to one of the Bible classes. Come and see what Jesus can do for you." Offer to pick them up. Offer to meet them in the parking lot.

But don't use the method I suggested when I was conducting an outreach seminar in Sweden. My Swedish was shaky at best. I wanted to say: "Tell the person: 'I'll meet you at church or I can stop by your house and give you a ride.'" The Swedish word for "give you a ride" is *schutza*. I used the word *schuta* instead. It translates: "I'll meet you at church or else I'll stop by your house and shoot you." One man in the congregation called out: "That might be effective, but it doesn't seem the Christlike way."

Even though the many predictions trying to set the date the world will end have so far all been proven to be wrong, we are living in the "Last Days" of our world. We don't speculate on just when the end may come, but we know for certain what the Bible says: "Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." The Bible speaks of the last days, not trying to create a panic among us, but rather a sense of the importance of our Christian life and witness. Sharing the Good News of Jesus and inviting others to come and see is extremely important in these last days. We may not get another chance.

It is possible to be over-cautious and too calculating. There was that day on the lakefront. The crowd had grown larger and larger till there were more than five thousand people there, listening to the words of Jesus. Jesus turned to Philip and asked: "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" The Bible goes on: "Jesus asked this only to test Philip...." It was a test that Philip failed. "Why," he stammered "200 denarii – 200 days' wages -- would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" And he probably was thinking one step further: "We don't have the money." Did you ever wonder about the preciseness of the answer Philip gave? "It would cost 200 denarii -- 200 days' wages." That's pretty exact. The Gospel of John hints at the answer. Philip had been thinking about it and calculating the cost for a while. John tells us that Jesus first asked Philip the question as the crowd was gathering. It wasn't until later in the day when Jesus had finished his teaching that the matter continued. I can just visualize Philip

calculating the cost in his head -- and every time another ten or fifteen people walk up, adding another denarius to his total.

Of course, Jesus knew what he intended to do. When the time was right, he took the boy's lunch of five rolls and two fish and multiplied it to feed the 5,000. Philip probably felt shame as he watched Jesus' miracle -- ashamed of his weakness of faith. "I should have known!" he might have thought. "Why didn't I answer him, 'Lord, this is a problem as far as we're concerned, but it's no problem to you.' Why didn't I have that kind of faith!" Philip had looked at the crowd, at the problem, and forgotten all about the power of Christ.

The next time Philip is mentioned in the Scriptures, it is Tuesday of Holy Week. A number of Greeks, foreigners, outsiders came to Philip. "We wish to see Jesus," they said. Perhaps they sought out Philip specifically because he had a Greek name. Philip wasn't sure it was a good idea to let foreigners have access to Jesus. He had to think this over first. There were a lot of practical considerations. "Perhaps we shouldn't bother Jesus at this time; He has a lot on his mind. Besides he's having all these problems with the Jewish leaders right now. Won't it just make matters worse if he openly fraternizes with foreigners?" Philip thought of the practical problems, the possible social and political implications, and hesitated to act. To his credit, he sought out a second opinion. And then, again to his credit, when Andrew said, "Of course, we'll take them to Jesus," Philip went along.

There's a practical lesson for you in this: Use your congregation and your fellow-members to help your Gospel-sharing efforts. Invite people to *come and see*, and let the friendliness of Christ the Rock Congregation, the joy in our worship, and the Gospel-message in the sermons work in your friends, relatives, work associates and neighbors. Partnering with you, Christ the Rock's pastor and people can provide the two things which studies show will lead first-time visitors to return to a church a second time. Reason #1: They received something meaningful for their life from the worship and especially the sermon. Reason #2: They felt welcome and comfortable because of the friendliness the members showed them.

There's one final scene in the Philip Story. Jesus and his disciples are gathered in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday evening on the night of Jesus' betrayal. Jesus speaks to them of the Father, the Father to whom he would soon be returning. He speaks of the many rooms in the Father's house which he will keep ready for those who believe in him. Suddenly Philip interrupts: "Lord, show us the Father and we shall be satisfied." All Jesus had done so far over three years wasn't enough. Philip's practical nature wanted one more proof. While a practical nature has its values, in Philip's case it also covered over weakness of faith.

Jesus spoke of the importance of being practical. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'" (Lk 14:28-29). Jesus was speaking of the cost of being a disciple and saying that discipleship means putting Jesus first. Nothing -- money, family, recreation, job -- nothing can be more valuable to us than our Savior. Being practical and a bit cautious helps us see the pitfalls and avoid them. It helps us remember that, if we are going to talk the talk, we must also walk the walk.

That being said, the flip side is equally true. The work of the Kingdom of God calls for faith and courage. It demands, above all, faith in God's ability to sustain, strengthen, and help us. It needs a continuing trust and confidence in the fact that "With God all things are possible." In all situations we need to remember: God is near! Christians serve their God best when they remember that they are not alone, but are fellow-workers with the living God. Philip looked at the crowd, at the problem, and forgot all about the power of Christ. Let's not make the same mistake when we consider how we can best serve the Lord with our time, talents, energy and offerings. In every situation we need to remember that God is here with us!

Philip's practical nature, at least in some of the incidents, masked a weakness of faith. But true faith was there. Now let's look again at the four incidents and see the **RESULTS BECAUSE JESUS BLESSED PHILIP'S FRUITS OF FAITH.**

Nathanael balked at Philip's invitation -- at first. But he could not resist the simple words: "Come and See" for yourself. Nathanael came, was called to faith and became another in that elite group of 12 who witnessed the entire three-year public ministry of Jesus and then told the world what Jesus had done.

Jesus took the boy's picnic lunch and fed the 5,000, another clear proof of his divinity and also of his concern for the well-being of those who come to him..

The Greeks met their Savior. Nothing more is said. Their coming to Jesus was the important thing, not the conversation. Jesus had no different message for them than what he had been giving to the Jews. The importance is that that message is also for the Greeks -- for the foreigners. Jesus' died for all -- the whole world. Jesus himself put it this way: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

And Philip's question after Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life..." -- well, that question led to more teaching by Jesus and gave us beautiful promises such as "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name...." (John 14:12-14).

Before the feeding of the 5,000 the Bible says Jesus "already had in mind what he was going to do." In the same way, we can be confident that God had it all planned out in each of the incidents where Philip's practical, overly cautious approach showed itself. And in each case, God accomplished his good purposes. And so it goes in our life. Jesus promises: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Philip followed faithfully and served the Lord, even if he repeatedly needed a nudge in the right direction. He is like the many faithful in congregations today whose practical nature balks at new ideas or undertakings, but, once the decision is made, dig in and work as hard as anyone to make it happen -- all to the glory of God. He is like each of us who often hesitate to boldly step forward for Christ -- and then later kick ourselves because we missed a good opportunity to say something that could have helped and vow next time we will speak up. We may not always act clearly and decisively in spiritual matters, but with his Word and sacraments God keeps nudging us in the right direction and then blessing our fruits of faith.

May the God of peace equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.