

Rev. Dan Welch Epiphany 2
1-14-18 Text- John 1:43-51

Two Sunday mornings ago, when I was taking some vacation time, I also took the opportunity to go to my home congregation in downtown Minneapolis. It was a nice treat to visit the church where I grew up worshiping and to talk with several people I hadn't seen in years. It was also interesting to take a quick drive through the big city and see what has changed and what has stayed the same, but in all honesty it was good to come back to good old Glencoe. I may have grown up in the big city, but I definitely like the many advantages of living in a smaller town. For instance, there is the feeling of safety and security when I go to sleep at night. I also like not having to fight traffic on the way to and from work every day. In fact, the closest thing to a traffic jam here is when you and another car pull up to four way stop sign at the same time and you're both too polite to want to go first! With all these things and more, I do have to say that one of the things I liked better about growing up in Minneapolis was riding in the elevators of the skyscrapers. That's right! I really enjoyed doing that when I was a boy when my Mom or older sisters would take me with to go shopping downtown. In just seconds you could be whisked away far above the noise and busyness of the city traffic and once you get to the nearest window or observation deck you are treated to a view that's simply amazing. On clear days from the observation deck on top of the tallest building in the upper mid-west, the IDS Building, you could see things miles away and the people on the streets down below looking like ants. Without elevators

though, those sweeping views of the city along with the peace and quiet of the observation deck would not be possible for a lot of people. I'm pretty sure that as a small boy I could not have climbed 57 stories to get to the top floor of the IDS building.

In the same kind of way, without an elevator of some sort, reaching heaven is absolutely impossible for us sinful human beings. Thankfully, our text today describes Jesus as what I'm going to call heaven's elevator. In Jesus, God descends to us and we ascend to God.

If you've ever ridden in an elevator in a tall building, like in a big hotel, you know that you usually have to wait a little while after the time you push the button to when the elevator actually arrives to take you to the floor you want to go to. For children on the 8th floor eager to use the elevator to go down to use the hotel swimming pool on the first floor, or for a tired business person who just wants to get up to his room on the 12th floor to get some sleep, the wait for the elevator can seem like an eternity. The believers in God who were waiting for the arrival of His promised Messiah felt the same way. It had been 400 years since God had last spoken to them through a prophet. Let's go back even further, though. In fact let's go back to right after the very beginning. Immediately after the fall into sin God promised to send to His people a savior but it wasn't until thousands of years later that the Savior, Jesus Christ came at long last. It's no wonder that in our Gospel today, Philip was so excited about Jesus. He went to his friend Nathanael and said: "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote -

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

In his excitement Philip stretched the truth a bit. **He** hadn't exactly found Jesus, it was **Jesus** who had found **him** (v. 43). Jesus had sought Philip out for the purpose of calling him as a disciple. What was true about Philip is true about you and me: Christianity is not about our search for God; it's about God's search for us.

How did Philip know that God had descended to him in the person of Jesus? Was it just a gut feeling Philip had? No. Philip became **convinced** that Jesus was the Messiah based on what the Old Testament prophets had written and how Jesus fulfilled them perfectly. And so our faith too is not based on feelings but on God's sure and certain promises. When Satan gets us to doubt the truth about Jesus - that He truly is our Savior from sin, that He is the Son of God, that He controls all things, that He cares for us, we better not look for some emotion inside of us to convince us of those truths. Instead look to the solid proof God's Word.

Although Philip was convinced from God's Word that Jesus was the Messiah, his friend Nathanael was not so quick to believe. “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked” (John 1:46). Philip didn't argue with him. He just told Nathanael to come and see Jesus for himself before he drew any conclusions. Philip's outreach strategy is a good pattern to follow. We often think that telling others about Jesus means proving to them through clever arguments that Jesus is their Savior. Philip knew that's not what he had to do. He only wanted to point his friend to Jesus and he was convinced that

Nathanael would see for himself that Jesus is the Messiah. So too our goal for outreach should not be to convert someone (only God, the Holy Spirit, can do the converting, anyway) instead our goal should be to point our friends and family to Jesus through God's Word. The best way to do this is through Worship and the study of the Bible. Invite your family and friends to “come and see” this Jesus Whom you worship and believe is God's Son. Assure them that you are not going to pressure them to convert, just try it out. What we're doing is simply giving the Holy Spirit the opportunity to convince them of what we know is the truth: Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Let them see for themselves what a difference the Lord can make for their life, too. The direction and the comfort He gives for our lives, and the peace of mind, knowing that our life is in His hands both now and forever. Invite a friend or family member to church, we'll even throw in a cookie and a cup of coffee at no cost.

Did the strategy work for Philip? Not the part about the cookie and coffee, I mean the inviting of his friend to come and see for himself! Well, as Nathanael approached Jesus, the Savior declared: “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael made the good confession, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel”.

Nathanael became convinced that Jesus is really God after Jesus demonstrated His omniscience, that is that fact that Jesus knows

everything. Before Nathanael knew **anything** about Jesus, Jesus knew **everything** about Nathanael. So is **this** why God has descended to us in the person of Jesus, to tell us that He's been looking in on us and knows what we're up to? That thought is enough to send shivers down our spine! You mean God sees everything I do and hears everything I say or think? Even though other people may not know what we really think or say about them, God does.

So has God come down from heaven in the person of Jesus to condemn us? No. God came down in the person of Jesus so that in Jesus we could go up to God. Jesus made that clear when He called Nathanael an Israelite in whom there was nothing false. Jesus could not have meant that Nathanael was without sin because the Bible makes it clear that all have sinned. Yet Jesus saw nothing false in him because He had come to pay for Nathanael's sins at the cross and give Nathanael credit for His righteousness. What Jesus came to do for Nathanael, He did for all people.

It's sad then when you hear people insist that they'll take the stairs to heaven instead of Jesus. That is, they think they'll find another way. I say this is sad because Jesus makes it clear there **is** no other way, "I am the Way and the Truth, and the Life no one comes to the Father (in heaven) except through Me." In the book of James, the writer of this Epistle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, makes it clear that taking the stairs to heaven is not an option. James said that if we break one of God's commands, we have broken them all (James 2:10). That's like climbing the stairs to the top of a skyscraper and slipping on a banana peel on the

35th floor. What happens in this case is that we don't just stumble on that one step; we slide all the way back down to the bottom and destroy all the stairs in the process. Because of our sin the only way up is in Jesus. We can't make the climb on our own.

If you've never been to the top of a skyscraper, you're really missing out on an amazing experience. Of course the thing with skyscrapers is if it's a foggy day, the view isn't so good. Thank God we won't have to worry about that happening as we ascend to heaven in Jesus. Up there the view is perfect. I will see you as the sinless person you'll be and you'll see me in the same way. We'll see life as God meant it to be. Don't miss out on that view. Don't miss out on that experience. In Christ, you won't. Amen.