

“Following Jesus”
Dr. David W. Swink
Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan
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John 1:43-51
<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193141739>

Jesus invites each of us to walk with him.

In today's Scripture Jesus, along with Andrew, and Peter are heading north to Galilee. They invite two other Galileans Philip and Nathanael to join them on the journey. Before accepting the invitation, Nathanael asks a serious question; "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael has some preconceived notions about Israel's Messiah. Nathanael demonstrates a classic case of the stereotypical disease. As he meets Jesus he has a problem seeing Jesus because of the negative mental pictures in his mind. How do you see Jesus?

*****Song by Robin: "Some Children See Him" *****

Stereotypical thinking is a barrier to relationships.

Many of us have Nathanael's problem. We have stereotypical lies learned through the years that keep us from a full relationship with Jesus. Nathanael did not originally think that all people from Nazareth were no good. He learned that supposed fact by hearing others proclaim it as truth. As children, we did not naturally think that:

- African Americans are lazy, ignorant, and on welfare;
- Italians are all members of the Mafia;
- Polish people are dumb and fat;
- Native Americans are drunks;
- Irish drink Guinness and dance jigs,
- Scots are cold and cheap,
- Chinese are all math wizards,
- husbands are pigs, and
- wives are nags.

American journalist [Walter Lippmann](#) called a stereotype a "picture in our heads." Some of the negative aspects of stereotypical thinking are:

- a justification of ill-founded prejudices or ignorance,
- an unwillingness to rethink one's attitudes and behavior towards stereotyped group, and
- the preventing some people of stereotyped groups from entering or succeeding in activities or fields. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype>)

We do not come into the world with racial, gender, national, or cultural stereotypes built into our heads. We are taught these mental pictures that, like Nathanael, create barriers to learning, barriers to relationships with others, and most importantly barriers to God. The good news is that while we were taught to fear and hate others, we can unlearn what we have been taught and relearn a different way of seeing the world.

****Josh White, Jr. "You've Got to be Taught"*****

Jesus confronted Nathanael's Nazareth stereotype with agape love.

Notice the Scripture does not record that Jesus said to Nathanael:

- "Hey you racist knucklehead where did you learn all that mess?" Or,
- "Hey, stupid why don't you grow up and get into the First Century?"

Jesus did not use one stereotype to challenge another stereotype. Jesus used a non-violent, love filled approach and affirmed what he could affirm about Nathanael. Jesus disarmed the stereotype by not living out the untruth of the stereotype. Jesus says to Nathanael, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." (vs. 47) In other words Jesus says to Nathanael:

- I affirm you and your desire for honesty.
- I affirm you and your working for God's truth.
- I affirm you in your desire for God's Kingdom to come on earth right now!

Jesus affirmed Nathanael and in doing so loved with God like love this flawed human being from Bethsaida.

In the middle of the Twentieth Century a man following Jesus learned the Jesus way of confronting stereotypical thinking with Christ like love that is demonstrated in this passage of Holy Scripture. This American Baptist pastor followed Jesus' teaching seriously and in so doing weakened the stereotypical thinking of our entire country in regards to African American people. We celebrate his life tomorrow.

We know that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assaulted and ultimately killed by persons whose stereotypes were threatened by his message. What we don't often understand is that Dr. King was also rejected by a number of the leaders of the large African American National Baptist Convention. Yet, Dr. King persisted in his non-violent, love filled message because the vision that Jesus gave to Nathanael was alive in Dr. King's heart. Jesus said that Nathanael, and all who will truly follow Jesus "will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (vs. 51) In Dr. King's final sermon in Memphis, Tennessee he proclaimed that he had been to the mountain top and seen God's new day dawning. God's Kingdom will come, Dr. King proclaimed even if he was not present to see it happen. Dr. King stood up with Jesus and confronted the white cultural stereotype of African American people.

The white persons Stereotype of African American people.

The common stereotype of African American people is actually codified in the U.S. Constitution. Although the words black, African, colored, or negro are not found anywhere in the document it was clear that persons of color were indicated when slave and slavery are implied;

- Section 2 of Article I states that apart from free persons "all other persons," meaning black slaves, are each to be counted as three-fifths of a white person for the purpose of apportioning congressional representatives on the basis of population.
- Section 9 of Article I states that the importation of "such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit," meaning African slave trade, would be permitted.
- And Section 2 of Article IV directs that persons "held to Service or Labor in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another," meaning fugitive slaves, were to be returned to their owners.
- The Bill of Rights, adopted in 1791, says nothing about slavery. But the Fifth Amendment guaranteed that no person could "be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." Slaves were property, and slaveholders had an absolute right to take their property with them, even into free states or territories.
(<http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/secessioncrisis/constitutiononslavery.html>)

The common stereotype of African American people being less than human was affirmed in the earliest years of our country by the Christian Church. Writing in 1823, Dr. Richard Furman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, created a document whose arguments for African Americans being less than human were used during slavery and during the years of the Jim Crow laws to justify treating African Americans as second class citizens.

1. Dr. Furman justifies the enslavement of Black people by quoting both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.
2. Dr. Furman suggests that the slave owner is the "Father" of the whole family including the slaves who are under his ownership, hence establishing the principle of patriarchy into the master/slave relationship.

3. Dr. Furman introduced the idea that slaves were really better off in slavery than with their families in Africa or with the free black people in the north. Therefore, they should rightly thank their owners for taking good care of them.
4. Dr. Furman says that Africans are not yet able to participate as full citizens and are on "probation" awaiting a time when they are intelligent enough to fully participate in the American civilization. (Rev. Dr. Richard Furman's Exposition of the view of the Baptists Relative to the colored population of the United States to the Governor of South Carolina)

It is very clear that the mental picture of the American white culture from the founding of our nation until the middle of the Twentieth Century was that: "Whites were superior to Blacks in all important ways, including but not limited to intelligence, morality, and civilized behavior; sexual relations between Blacks and Whites would produce a mongrel race which would destroy America; treating Blacks as equals would encourage interracial sexual unions; any activity which suggested social equality encouraged interracial sexual relations; if necessary, violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

(<http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm>)

If you grew up in the South prior to 1960, then you believed this stereotype as God's truth taught in the Bible and under girded by our government. I know because this is what I was taught, what I assimilated, and what I believed.

Could any good African American person come out of Birmingham, Alabama in the middle part of the Twentieth Century? Could an educated, articulate, strong, hard working, dynamic African American man stand up and speak God's love to the stereotypical power of over 300 years? Following Jesus' example Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr stood up in the 1950's and 1960's and the 300 year old stereotype of African American people was weakened enough to allow major changes to occur. But, his standing up came with a price that many in his community did not want to pay.

Many African American Church Leaders Sat Down.

What is rarely remembered in the wider culture is that a new Baptist denomination was formed in the early 1960's. The Progressive Baptist Convention was formed when young pastors stood up with Dr. King when the older pastors of the National Baptist Convention sat down and wanted nothing to do with him.

Before we condemn those older more timid pastors, I want us to remember the deep anxiety in which they lived. They and their congregations suffered under the legal imposition of the 300 year old stereotype against African American people. After slavery was abolished, the Jim Crow laws created a segregated society where the white people were considered superior and the black people considered inferior. A Harvard graduate who happened to be an African American male traveling in the South could not eat in a white restaurant, attend a white church, stay in a white motel, or relieve himself in a white bath room. And, that is just the tip of the Jim Crow impact on persons of color. The penalty for violating the Jim Crow laws was often death. Between 1882 (when reliable statistics were first collected) and 1968 (when the classic forms of lynching had disappeared), 4,743 persons died of lynching, 3,446 of them black men and women. (http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/lynching/lynching.htm)

If you have a trusting relationship with a person of African American descent, and you ask them about lynching they will most probably have a personal story of a friend or family member who was lynched. The anxiety, the fear, the pain is deep within the African American Community over this issue that was mostly ignored by the wider white community and often celebrated by the white Southern participants. As amazing as it seems to us now, many of the lynching's were photographed with women and children in attendance.

Most African American pastors remembered the events of January, 1923, when an entire town in central Florida was massacred for the crime of being black skinned. The State of Florida ultimately apologized to the descendents of the now extinct town of Rosewood and paid them reparations for their loss. However, the hate filled warning message of Rosewood is still alive within the African American community.

The pastors who did not welcome Dr. King's message and movement ultimately did step up and support. They did begin to stand up and speak out. But, they were on the end of the train. There were many at the front of the movement who spoke up much earlier and are remembered for their courage. Josh White, Jr. sings a song that his father sang to President Franklin Roosevelt about the second class treatment of African Americans by the United States military. .

****Josh White, Jr. "Uncle Sam Says"*****

Jesus invites us to let go of stereotypes and celebrate God's love!

Only by facing the reality of our mental pictures can we actually create a new vision for our world! Nathanael has to face his mental barrier, let it go, and be willing to follow Jesus, the Nazarene. We must face the ugly reality of our American racial stereotyping of persons whose skin is darker than ours, let it go, and be willing to work and live together bringing about God's Kingdom right here and right now. Like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the mid Twentieth Century, we are called by Jesus to live and love in a new way in the Twenty First Century.

The African American theologian Dr. James Cone in his new book, The Cross and the Lynching Tree, writes of the challenges we face together in the Twenty First Century. "I wrestle with questions about black dignity in a world of white supremacy because I believe that the cultural and religious resources in the black experience could help all Americans to cope with the legacy of white supremacy and also deal more effectively with what is called 'the war on terror'. If white Americans could look at the terror they inflicted on their own black population---slavery, segregation, and lynching---then they might be able to understand what is coming at them from others. Black people know something about terror because we have been dealing with legal and extralegal white terror for several centuries. Nothing was more terrifying than the lynching tree."

- Out of the racial terror grew hymns of courage and hope.
- Out of deep, personal pain and loss grew a church based upon love and forgiveness.
- Out of a culture of oppression, grew a number of pastors who stood up and still stand up for equality of education and opportunity.
- Out of a culture of death, came a free people proclaiming the hope of life with Jesus Christ now and for all eternity.

We can learn from the Black Church how to live with courage, hope, and love in the face of global terror and economic uncertainty. We have living among us, Jesus followers who invite us to follow the example of Nathanael and drop our stereotype and celebrate Gods unity among us. After all, Jesus overcame Nathanael's stereotype. There really was someone good, someone real good who did come from Nazareth. And, that someone, overcame the world! And, as we follow Jesus the Nazarene, we too can overcome the world.

****Robin, Josh White, Jr & Chilson. "We Shall Overcome"*****

Will you accept Jesus' invitation.

Following Jesus isn't something prepackaged. Jesus invites you to a real, honest to goodness journey through your mental pictures into God's new vision for life. You can make excuses, or you can choose to accept Jesus' invitation. Make no mistake about it.

- If you go with Jesus, you will be changed.
- If you go, you will have your priorities challenged.
- If you go, you will have to give up your mental pictures.
- If you go with Jesus you will take on some new things.
- Learning with Jesus is an adventure. You will not be bored.
- You will not be comfortable. Jesus will continue to challenge you to step out of your preconceived mental pictures and learn from Him.
- Jesus tells you that the way is not popular or easy.
- Yet, following Jesus will bring you more joy, more love, more courage, more faith, more hope, and more peace than any other path you can walk.

Jesus is inviting you to walk with him this morning. Let's tell him we're coming.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS
For Sunday, January 15, 2012's Sermon
Foundational Scripture: John 1:43-51
<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193291651>

Sermon Title: "Following Jesus"

Sermon Question: What stereotypes are keeping me from seeing Jesus?

Sermon Synopsis: Stereotypes keep us from seeing and experiencing Jesus.

Featured Scripture Reflection: "Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said, 'Come and see.'"

Opening Icebreaker: What stereotypes do you struggle to overcome (Include stereotypes regarding gender, age, disabilities etc.)?

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read **John 1:35-42**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193291692> What stands out to you about this story? What questions does it raise? What does it tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about the disciples?
- Read **John 1:43-51**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193291651> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? How does this passage add to your understanding of Jesus? Of Nathanael? Of Philip?
- Read **Colossians 3:5-11**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193294708> How does this passage compliment what was read in the previous passages? Note the final verse – what do you notice about this list?

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the "Good News" in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me? (i.e. - How are these passages speaking to me?)

God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?

A prayer

God, help us to remember that you love everyone with the same unconditional love. Help us to move past judgments based on outward appearances and instead love others as children of God.