

Life Sunday Resources

Sermon Preparation Notes
Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

SERMON: Second Sunday after the Epiphany (Series B),

Title: “For You before the World was Made.”

Text: John 1:43-51

Other Lessons: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139:1-10; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Bulletin Verse: “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” (1:48)

Suggested Hymns: *LSB* 402 “The Only Son from Heaven”
 LSB 726 “Evening and Morning”
 LSB 594 “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It

Liturgical Setting

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany takes place a week after the Baptism of our Lord. Life issues for the Christian revolve around how the Lord has made a person his child through baptism, or how he desires to make a person his child through baptism. The Life issues – abortion, euthanasia, IVF, etc. – affect the life of a person who is a child of the Lord through baptism or the life of a person that the Lord wants to make his child. Life Sunday in 2009 also falls on the Confession of St. Peter, which could provide a different emphasis on life issues than are taken with these readings.

Psalm 139 is the appointed Psalm for the day. In it, David confesses that the Lord has searched him and known him (v1). The Lord knows when a person sits or stands (v2); there is no place a person can go to flee from the Lord’s presence (v7). Here is a recognition that the Lord knows all there is to know about a person. The Lord is a Lord who knows the details of each person’s life; he is not a far off God but a near God. Although not a part of the appointed reading, verses 13-16 cannot be forgotten on Life Sunday, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret... Your eyes saw my unformed substance...” This same Lord who forms and knows the person in the womb, saw Nathanael and called him to be his disciple. Christ befriended Nathanael.

Liturgically, John 1:43-52 fits with the context begun at Christmas, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was made flesh.” Jesus, the Word of God who created the heavens the earth, became flesh. Although the creator of the universe, his inward parts were knitted together in his mother’s womb when he was made in secret. God becoming man is the mystery of the incarnation. The liturgical context continues with the preaching of John the Baptist that he is not the Christ, but one greater is coming. Jesus is identified as the Lamb of God and is baptized by John the Baptist. After this, Jesus begins to call his disciples. The Gospel appointed for Life Sunday is the calling of Nathanael, whom Christ saw under the fig tree. The hearer of this text is to see that Jesus has seen him and called him just as he did Nathanael. The application to Life Sunday is that the Lord knows and cares for all people. He desires to call and befriend them. As Christians we also care and love our neighbor as Jesus did.

Textual Notes

V45 – Luther, AE 22, 182, “And these, as you see here, He received in a friendly way. He could adapt himself to the people so that they loved and followed Him.

Thus John’s theme is not the calling of the apostles into office; it is their congenial association with Christ. He wishes to tell us that they joined Him because of His friendly attitude toward the people. Then

John the Baptist's disciples were also motivated by their masters testimony and message about Christ. They heard and saw Christ, learned to know Him, and became personally acquainted with Him. However, these did not immediately become Christ's disciples, nor did Christ call them into office at this time. After they had formed a friendship with Christ, they left Him and returned home. But later, when Christ came to the Sea of Galilee on His wanderings, He called them into the apostolate. At the time when they saw Christ on the banks of the Jordan, they did not suppose that one day they would become His disciples. With these words the evangelist points out that Christ the Lord had an unusual way of attracting people and of associating with them."

V47 - Luther, AE 22, 186, "Although Christ did not call Nathanael into the apostolate, He conversed in a very friendly tone with him. He was only Christ's good friend; and yet we do not read anywhere that Christ chatted in so friendly a manner with Peter or the other apostles, or, for that matter, even with John the Baptist. These words surely give evidence of a warm friendship: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" ([John 1:47](#)). Also: "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" ([John 1:51](#)). Nathanael is neither a prophet nor an apostle; still he enters the circle of Christ's friends as highly regarded as the other three who became acquainted with Christ before him."