

Becoming a Disciple of Jesus  
Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Sermon Text: John 1:35-51

*The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>and he looked at Jesus as He walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" <sup>39</sup>He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. <sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup>He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). <sup>42</sup>He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). <sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>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." <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup>Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup>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." <sup>49</sup>Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup>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." <sup>51</sup>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."*

Usually, when a person changes their life completely, something significant has happened in their life. Sometimes it's a crisis, sometimes a miracle. There are also people who search at length for a deeper meaning in their lives and ultimately stumble upon something that so impresses them that they completely change their life and go in a different direction. But how does this work when people become Christians? I know that there are people who become Christians because of the very reasons mentioned a moment ago. Some were participants of a major evangelism movement or some special events or stumbled upon some great insight and then decided to become Christians. But there is also the exact opposite of this. There are people who fall away from Jesus because they have nothing to do with the church anymore. Or there are also those who believe in God but can't imagine that the church has anything to do with this faith. So what is it like when someone comes to faith? What is the decisive factor in this? And what moves people to not only become Christians but also to become part of the great multitude of Jesus' disciples?

In our sermon text for today, we learn how this happens. Everything begins with an unassuming desert wanderer who cries out to the whole world: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Even though the term "Lamb of God" already comes from the Old Testament, it is hard to imagine why the disciples turned their lives upside down and became disciples of Jesus based solely on this statement from John. Yes, we quickly notice that with these disciples, it wasn't about a great new piece of information or experiences but about something very practical: "Where are You staying?" This was the first question they asked Jesus. The narrative of Jesus' first disciples is kept plain and simple as possible. There was no fanfare from heaven nor were gifts or medals distributed that would have convinced the disciples to now become fans of Jesus forever. No pressing matters were resolved with a handshake either. What motivated the disciples to follow Jesus was simply the desire to be there. That will be too little for some of us. We would like to follow a Jesus who would do more. He should work harder for the poor, heal the sick, or solve big problems. We would like to follow a Jesus who answers all the nagging questions at once so that we would now know everything. Jesus does all of this too... but that's not why we follow Him! The reason the first disciples followed Jesus wasn't so much their decision, it was God who determined it all. And He had John say: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The disciples certainly didn't understand immediately what this all would mean. It is even doubtful if they understood even a fraction of it. The Bible doesn't record great realization but keeps the calling of the disciples plain and simple. It is even recorded that some had great doubt. Nathanael for example very skeptically asked the question: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" With this, I notice that the disciples aren't so different from the people asking questions today: "Why should I give so much money to this church which only provides a setting for family gatherings and occasionally tries to support people in crisis? Life can also function well without church. What good can come out of the church?" Yes, many people leave the church because it's simply not effective enough. For the disciples of Jesus, it was different. For them, we recognize that they

were ready to change everything and to follow Jesus. They wanted it. Even when there were no convincing arguments for it. What moved them? Only this: they were directly and personally connected to Jesus! Life with Jesus was even more important than anything else! That's why the first disciples didn't ask: "where and at what time are You having Your lectures?" or even: "when does Your church service begin?" When the first disciples asked about Jesus' accommodation, it all indicates that they wanted to share their lives with Him. They wanted to live with Him! They wanted to experience their life with Him and together with Him. Jesus' life should also become a part of their lives. In early Christianity, this shared experience that the disciples had with Jesus was highly valued. Therefore, only those who witnessed Jesus in the flesh could be apostles. The church is the body of Christ. So if you want to be there, you don't have to do anything but be with Jesus – going to worship, praying together, having Bible study together, talking about personal and other problems together – being together with Jesus has great importance, even when we come with many questions or doubts. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. The less we go to church, the less we listen to God's Word, the less time we have with and for one another, the less all of this makes sense to us. Christian fellowship is more than just socializing. What it means to live together with Jesus we learn about in the Old Testament. There it says that God Himself will make His dwelling among us. The separation between us and God should be overcome through a direct and personal connection with Jesus. It isn't enough to know a lot about Jesus. Nor is it enough to fulfill one's duties faithfully and to diligently keep the commandments. It is also not important to have a beautiful setting for family celebrations. When Jesus comes into the world, that means that God comes to us, and a new life begins with Him. Living with Jesus means that we are allowed to be right at the meeting point between heaven and earth. We come to God in this place with all our sins, needs, and our broken hearts. Jesus doesn't take away all our problems immediately. Nathanael certainly had questions after his calling to be a disciple. And Peter remained a quick-tempered and emotionally impulsive person his entire life and was often unaware of his own limitations. But right at this point, where they all were, God opened a window to heaven – they saw Jesus. They saw the Lamb of God and that's why they also saw God among us. God, through Jesus, takes us into His great arms, forgives us, and gives us a glimpse into the future. This God can't be found anywhere else but where John proclaims it: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" So God is not present in just any person, but only in this one Jesus. And Jesus answers the question of the disciples with another invitation: "Come and see!" Jesus doesn't say: "If you want to be my followers, you must first do this or that." Instead, He simply says: "Come and see!" Come and see where Jesus is! Come and see where you can connect with Jesus. Even today, Jesus isn't found just anywhere, in just any program – Jesus can only be found where He gives Himself and Jesus does this clearly when He took bread and wine and said: "This is My body... this is My blood!" When we are so intimately connected with Jesus, He isn't just with us for that moment. No, Jesus lives in every aspect of our lives, in our family, at work, in our lonely moments, and especially in those places where we are in need and have lost hope. Jesus is intimately connected with us and wants to be with us, He doesn't just want to live out of the way in a guest room, He wants to be present everywhere, right in the middle of our lives.

The disciples at that time did exactly that. They lived with Jesus. By living with Jesus, they didn't receive fried chicken from heaven or money. But you can clearly see what happened to them. You can see how they wanted to spread the word to everyone immediately that they had found Jesus!

Simon Peter heard the words of his brother and came. In the encounter between Jesus and Peter, it becomes clear what happens to us when we meet Jesus. Jesus said: "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (Peter)." Simon remains a poor fisherman. His lack of faith and stubbornness was always evident even as a Christian. But that didn't matter. The bottom line is that Peter lives in Christ. And by living in Christ, Peter becomes a rock for himself and for all other Christians in the world. That applies to all of us too. We come to Jesus with our wretched lives, much is broken, and we have no hope for the future. We also have many questions about ourselves, the church, and about faith. That's completely normal. Jesus enters right into this situation and says: "Come and see!" Amen.