

## Finding and Being Found

John 1:43-51, Psalm 139, 1 Samuel 3:1-10

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My mom sewed a lot for me all through my years at home, and into my young adulthood. She made my prom dress. She made my wedding dress. She made lots of dresses. We would go dress shopping and I wouldn't find what I called "the right dress." I was hard to fit, which was part of it. But I would like the sleeves from this one, but the hem was too short. Or the neckline of this was nice but the waist didn't fit and would be hard to take in. I couldn't find "the right dress," and we would get exasperated and go to the fabric store and find a pattern that she could work with.

Every once in a great while, when we went shopping, I would find "the right dress." I knew it as soon as I saw it. I could tell it would fit, that it was the right color, that I liked it. There was no need to look any more. It was the right dress, and we had found it.

Over the years, though, I've kind of given up on shopping long enough to find the right dress. I find some good enough dresses, some okay dresses, some dresses that will do for a while. But I rarely am patient enough, or motivated enough, to find the right dress. I can't remember the last time I've had that "Eureka! There it is" feeling.

There's lots of kinds of finding, of searching and finding. That's one of them. There are at least a couple of kinds of seeking and finding going on in our Scripture passages today. This reading from John is usually focused on Jesus calling the disciples, and them following him. We're going to get something quite similar from Mark's gospel in our reading next week.

John, of course, is completely different. Everything he writes works on several levels at once. Mark is more straightforward. But John uses a word, three times in the first few verses, and then when we back up, there it is again. We're going to take this in order. If we back up from our passage, Jesus is calling the first two disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew. In verse 41, Andrew says to his brother Simon Peter, "We have *found* the Messiah!" Right then and there, from the get-go, Andrew knows who Jesus is, and testifies to that knowledge right away.

Then in our reading, verse 43. Jesus *found* Philip and said to him "Follow me." Verse 45. Philip *found* Nathanael and said to him, "We have *found* him about

whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

That’s a lot of finding in the space of five verses. What kind of finding is it? Or, a better question, what kindS of finding are they?

Verse 41, Andrew to Peter, and verse 45, Philip to Nathanael, are essentially the same. We’ve found the Messiah, the one we’ve been expecting, the one we’ve been waiting for, and it’s this guy, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. That’s one kind of finding. We know what we’re looking for, we have expectations of what it will be like, and we know it when we see it. I think this is quite similar to my quest for “the right dress.” I knew I needed a new dress. I expected certain qualities of the dress: it would fit, it would be a good color, it would be in our price range. And I knew it when I saw it. I recognized it. In effect, Andrew and Philip are pointing to Jesus and saying, “We found just the right dress.” Which is a sentence I never imagined saying, and let’s not take it out of context, because it gets pretty weird if we do.

There’s a different kind of finding, that’s what we do when we know we’ve lost something. Etta’s experience recently about losing her ring is the perfect example. The ring was lost. She didn’t rest easy until she’d found it again. That kind of seeking and finding is more intense than what Andrew and Philip were doing. You can’t sustain that intense kind of looking over the long haul, and it had been a long haul that the Jewish people had been wanting to find the Messiah. The Messiah wasn’t precisely lost. The looking for Messiah had become such a part of them and their history and culture that they were always on the lookout. And when they found Jesus, they knew. Eureka! The right dress.

Now let’s look at the finding in verse 43, Jesus found Philip. Now, Philip wasn’t lost, I don’t think. Philip apparently didn’t know Jesus was looking for him. Jesus found Philip and called him, and Philip followed.

Our other two Scripture readings fall into this same pattern. Psalm 139, which was our call to worship: “If I ascend to heaven, you are there, if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.” God is going to find us. God made us and knows us better than we know ourselves, and God will find us.

And the 1 Samuel reading. God finds Samuel, not in an unlikely place, but definitely at an unlikely young age. God calls Samuel and keeps calling Samuel until he realizes what is happening and answers. God finds Samuel.

What Andrew and Philip didn't quite convey is that when they "found" the Messiah, the Messiah had also found them. They hadn't been looking for an inanimate object all those centuries. They had been looking for a person, who was also looking for them. They had found the finder.

There's one "found" we haven't talked about it. Jesus found Philip. And then Philip found Nathanael and dragged him to come and see Jesus. Once we are found by the finder, then we too become finders. It doesn't seem like Philip and Nathanael had any pre-existing relationship. We don't know how Philip knew Nathanael was a person he was looking for. We don't hear how Philip knew he had found Nathanael. That's all kind of frustrating to me. How do we know who we're looking for? How do we know who we're supposed to find? I'm guessing it's a "that's the right dress" moment. When we find the person God has sent us to find, we know.

Let us rest in the assurance of being found, no matter where we wander. And in that assurance, let us be finders, too.