

Young Adult Sunday

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Jacob Parker-Burgard

How many of you are familiar with the concept of networking? (Pause) Okay, so some of you/a good amount of you/most of you. For those of you who aren't, I'll give a brief description. For those of you who, like me, have been on the job hunt for a while and are quite familiar with networking, thank you very much, just bear with me for a minute. Networking is when people meet with each other to establish connections that would be beneficial in some way, usually for professional or career-oriented purposes. For instance, if I attend a job fair in which I talk to a bunch of people and exchange contact information with them in the hopes of landing an interview, that's networking. If I post on Facebook that I'm looking for someone who works in a certain field and other people respond, that's networking. And if I say to you, "Hey, I know someone that I think would be really good for you to meet," that's networking.

Now, does that last example sound familiar? It should, because that's basically what happens in today's scripture lesson. Five men are inspired to follow Jesus, and of those five, only one of them, Philip, receives a direct invitation from Jesus himself. The other four are introduced to Jesus through someone else, and, of course, in doing so, they find their lives changed. Andrew and another unnamed disciple hear about Jesus from John the Baptist, and then Andrew brings in Simon Peter. Then, after Jesus recruits Philip, Philip goes off and tells Nathanael. It's an ancient networking event, though it takes place in a religious context rather than a professional one. It's also unique in that it's the only account of the calling of Jesus' disciples that unfolds in a more egalitarian manner. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus calls out to the disciples and directly invites them to follow him. But the Gospel of John, being the Gospel of John, does things differently, and brings in the followers of Jesus through this system of peer-to-peer sharing.

If we look at the roles that these five followers of Jesus play in this event, we see two kinds. The first is played by everyone: the role of someone who is willing to hear about Jesus. Some, like the two disciples of John the Baptist, are eager and quick to follow this Lamb of God. Others, like Nathanael, display some hesitancy and skepticism,

but are still willing to come and check things out. The second role is that of someone willing to *share* their experiences. As modern followers of Jesus, we have both the capacity and the calling to do both. We might not want to go to all our friends and just tell them, “Come follow Jesus with me,” but that’s not the only way to be inviting and open. We may say, “Hey, friend, I’m part of a group that’s putting together a huge strawberry-themed festival in June; you should come check it out!” Or, “Say, my friendly colleague, if you’re looking for a community project to help out with, I know a place that manages a garden that grows food for the local food pantry.” Or—and I know this *has* happened in PF—“Hi, classmate, do you want to join me on Sunday evenings for this group meeting with tons of cool people, where we talk and sing and play games?” That’s something that we’re very capable of doing, and—let’s be honest—that’s how we grow our church. People may not be so inclined to come to church if it’s presented as this institution with a leader who’s trying to bring more people in. After all, however much we may wish that this is not the case, institutions aren’t always trustworthy. But if the church is presented as a community that’s recommended by a friend or two, that might get people thinking. In job networking, one’s success of finding a good job goes way up if they use networking, instead of just sending out applications. And the same applies to church networking. If we want to grow our faith community and welcome more people in, then we should make it about peer-to-peer sharing. After all, wouldn’t you be more inclined to try something out if you heard about it from a friend?

So when we think of how Jesus gathered his disciples, maybe we should think about John’s take on it, about how people brought each other in through this faith-based networking—and, as followers of Jesus in the twenty-first century, how we can do the same.