

Finding Nathanael

John 1: 43 - 50

“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

(words in red refer to the images)

**Archie Bunker:** Anybody remember Archie Bunker?

If you don't know who he is listen to this brief clip and you'll soon get the idea. (You-tube clip)



[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=archie+bunker+on+jews](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=archie+bunker+on+jews)

Now Archie had a thing about Jews, and Poles, and immigrants, - and obviously blacks – racist to the core; his comments possibly acceptable as humour, but only because those laughing don't share those views. And although we react very negatively to blatant racism when it's publicly expressed, I suspect we each have unrecognised biases which still mildly colour our judgements.

Jokes about Aussies, Pommies, Jaffas, and Irish jokes have probably brought a smile to our lips, particularly if well told – ask Diane sometime to tell you the joke about the Englishman, the Scotsman and the Irishman marooned on a desert island.

When I was about 12 our family moved from the city to a small country town in **Central Hawkes Bay** – Waipukurau, Waipuk, or Waikikamukau, And just five miles away there was another small country town called Waipawa. Both had started about the same time, both were about the same size, and both had very small district high-schools.

But because we had the hospital



and the sale-yards, and business was marginally better, we tended to look down on them as the ‘poor relations’.

Rivalry between the local sports teams was high, and put-down jokes abounded.

I suspect small-town rivalry has always been around, justified or not, and so we have an ‘Archie Bunker’ type comment as the first words out of **Nathanael’s** mouth when he hears that Jesus, the son of a carpenter, comes from the hill town of Nazareth while he lived by the lake in Bethsaida.

(That’s about as far as Waipuk is from Dannevirke)



And of course in the days when I went to primary school there were Catholic schools - taught by nuns . . . and that seem very strange indeed, and if Dave Allen’s recounting of his experience, is anything to go by it was pretty strange for the Irish kids who went to convent schools.

([You-tube clip](#))



And while we laugh let’s keep in mind that the Pressie church has its own tradition of pulpit-thumping, fire and brimstone preachers.

However, I can assure you that Catholic schools have come a long way since Dave Allen’s far off schooldays.

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=dave+allen+on+religion](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=dave+allen+on+religion)

I was handy-man and cleaner at **Holy Family** in Wanaka for several years – knew the staff well, and many of the children came from our congregation. It was a delightful place for young children to learn Christian values along with the three ‘Rs’. And while there was a crucifix in their beautiful new church alongside, I don’t recall seeing one in the school.

Just like here in Eastbourne the churches had a very good working relationship. And programs like Messy Church and Mainly Music are opportunities to assist families from all our churches (or none) with their children's growth in the faith.



Now our reading from the first book of Samuel has within it an interesting pattern for the way in which anyone, but particularly a child grows in their understanding of the faith.



Samuel was brought by **his mother** to serve in the tabernacle when it was under Eli's care at Shilo and the reasons for this decision are outlined in the opening chapter. John Westerhoff, Professor of Theology and Christian Nurture at Duke University, suggests this is what he would term Experienced faith, when we receive the faith that is important to those who nurture us as children or befriend and mentor us as adults. experience the faith through them

The next stage for Samuel was as he was growing in his knowledge and ability to carry out his duties as a young Levite under Eli's instruction.

But the text reminds us that Samuel, did not yet know the Lord, His was the faith of his family the faith of his mentor or other priestly associates. He had a role to play and duties to perform and it is clear that he was developing in his designated tasks – attending to the Menorah, trusted with the security detail – sleeping in the sanctuary to ensure that nothing untoward happened to the tabernacle or the Ark of the Covenant within. In Westerhoff's terms that's Affiliative faith.

The next stage identified by Westerhoff is what he called Searching faith, when one wrestles through questions and challenges toward a personal understanding, and a listening for the voice of God.



For Samuel this began with him thinking the voice he was hearing was Eli's and it took a while for Eli to recognise what was going on. The text has already told us that 'the Word of the Lord was rare in those days' And although the task of sharing what he had heard from God was difficult he rose to the challenge with the support of his mentor.

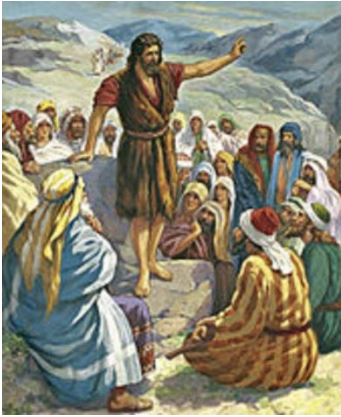
For us it may be running into alternative views held by people we respect; a growing familiarity with the written word in Scripture; words of a song or a poem that open new understandings or challenge received ideas. Whatever it may be, wrestling with the challenge leads to deeper understanding and growth in a personal conviction which Westerhoff calls Owned faith. He adds that each of these stages grows out of the one before so that the effect is like the growth of a tree which develops by adding successive rings. Experienced faith, Affiliative Faith, Searching Faith, Owned faith

However, I believe there is a further stage which keeps the process going and that is the relational dimension which Samuel's direct experience of God established. (It was so much more . . .)  
'As Samuel grew up the Lord was with him ... and all Israel knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord'

Now in our reading from John's gospel we can be assured that each of those mentioned had already been through those initial stages of faith.

They would have attended **synagogue school**, the Holy Family of their day, at least till they were twelve, been instructed in the Law and the Prophets, probably been taken on the annual family trip to the temple for Passover and had their bar mitzvar before taking on the chosen occupation.





And these young men were clearly searching for answers. Some had travelled down to the Jordan to learn from **the Baptist**.

He was the one who directed them to his cousin Jesus. So, one of the important dimension to growing in faith is to keep open to new possibilities.

In addition to that, having spent time with Jesus, they were so excited by what he had to say that they couldn't resist rushing off to share it with family and friends.

Andrew went to his brother Simon and said "Come and see who I've just met. I think he might be the Messiah!" And so Simon went to meet this Jesus, who called him Cephas. That's Aramaic for the Greek word 'Petros' – usually translated as Peter. But I really think Jesus was just giving him a nickname. "You're the Rock" is what I think he said. Just as he called James and John 'the sons of thunder.'

Ignatius of Loyola gave his followers a productive form of bible study in which you imagine yourself to be in the story yourself, and from that perspective explore what is going on. It's quite easy when dealing with the narratives in the synoptic gospels, - Mathew, Mark, and Luke , but with John it's a little more difficult. In this account it's not at all clear where all this took place, nor where Jesus was staying, nor yet Andrew and Simon, but it was after Jesus had decided to go to Galilee that he meets up with Philip who, like all the others was from that area.

I like to imagine that they were a whole group of Galileans who had come down to spend a few days with John, and were heading back to Galilee when Jesus decided to go with them. So his words to Phillip were more likely "Walk with me," and as a result of that journey together, Philip goes to find Nathanael.

So right at the beginning of John's gospel we have outlined the dynamic of discipling with which Matthew ends his. "Go and make disciples" Go and find others whom the Lord is drawing to himself – not just for the good of an elite group, of an ancient faith, set in a small Mediterranean country, but for the redemption of all the world.

As I've already said, Nathanael's response was quite dismissive of someone about whom he knew nothing, and the dismissive response to our faith is just as real today. To this dismissive attitude, Andrew and Philip gave the most effective response - "Come and see."

Come and experience what it's all about.

Come and join us in an area or activity you find meaningful.

Come and join us as we wrestle with the task of living the faith in what can often seem a challenging, if not hostile world.

Come and walk with Jesus

And as he said, "The fields are ripe for the harvest"

The time is now!