

“To be or not to be...” Do you recognize this phrase? Of course it is from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Act 3 scene 1. Here it is in its entirety.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.--Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.

Wow! How many well known phrases have come from these 37 lines? It is almost too bad that both Shakespeare and the Bible have become known not for the greatness that lies within their words but in the greatness lent to the overall language. As high schoolers a friend came up with his own take on Hamlet’s soliloquy.

To shave or not to shave: that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the nicks and cuts of outrageously dull blades, Or to take comfort in the soft beard of youth... Yes, well, we did have fun with many more of the Bard’s turn of a phrase!

But what has this to do with our Gospel of John reading? What, indeed! Our reading today is about the calling of two people who became disciples of Jesus. One was Philip and the other was Nathanael.

Philip, according to the biblical record, seems to have had something of the missionary instinct, going to tell his friend Nathanael about meeting Jesus, but he was not quick to understand that Jesus was not limited by the things that limit others. That’s why it was Philip who told Jesus that they did not have sufficient resources to feed the 5,000. He also seemed not ready to act decisively, for when some Greeks approached Philip about meeting Jesus, Philip took the request to Andrew rather than acting on his own.

Nathanael, however, appears as a skeptic – a religious skeptic, mind you – but a skeptic nonetheless. Hearing that Jesus was from Nazareth, he wonders aloud if anything good can come from that place. He’s called Nathanael in the gospel of John, he’s usually presumed to be the disciple called Bartholomew in the other three gospels. And there’s no detail at all about him under that name in those gospels. He certainly is not outspoken like Peter or even verbal about his doubts like Thomas. From John’s gospel, however, we see that he does seem to have one virtuous characteristic; for Jesus calls

him “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” That’s unquestionably a compliment, but the lack of deceit (or what other translations call “guile”) is hardly the same thing as active discipleship. Even as he starts to believe Jesus is the Son of God, it’s not because he has some innate faith, but because Jesus told him something about himself that a regular human being could not possibly have known.

Though very different individuals they both do something that we need to learn. They did not carefully watch and listen to Jesus for some period of time and then stand back and say to themselves, “Hmmm, to be like Jesus or not to be like Jesus: that is the question.” Or did it ever occur to you that they would ask that? Jesus, after all, didn’t go around handing out WWJD bracelets, t-shirts, bookmarks, coffee mugs, hats, and pet leashes. Jesus never said to any of his followers, “Now watch carefully what I do and say, how I do and say it, then go out and behave the same way.”

Jesus was not interested in having a bunch of clones for followers. He wasn’t even interested in getting even one of the religious authorities of the day into his inner circle, though a few did come around, namely Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus was not interested in having a crew of copycats as his posse – wearing their robes and beards like he did, walking and talking like he did, healing and preaching like he did.

Nope, not at all. What Jesus was looking for was a response of the gut, a full intestinal pull to lay down what they were doing, how they were living, leaving behind all that they had to simply follow. Follow. “Follow me,” was what Jesus said and apparently that is what Philip and Nathanael did – for the rest of their lives. This is important to note.

Even then, though, the resemblance of these two to Jesus was not likely in some reformatting of their personalities but in *how they opened the personalities they already had* to be directed by God. No doubt Philip and Nathanael continued to have the same abilities and the same inabilities they had before Jesus called them. It was only *in their willingness to be used by God that they could be described as Christlike.*

Jesus never said, “Be like me.” And when Jesus calls us to follow him, he does not ask us to cease being the unique persons that we are and become his twin. Jesus calls us to open ourselves to be **God’s** persons. We *should* strive to be like Jesus in loving God and loving our neighbor, but we have to do that through our own talents, abilities, hang-ups, shortcomings and insights. We’re to be disciples and our prayer should be something like, “O Lord, take who I am, all that I’ve got and use it for the kingdom. Where I fall short, mold me as you want me to be ...”

There is some value of the WWJD question that was way popular a few years ago. It is a useful way to approach puzzling circumstances. But perhaps a more realistic version of it is, WSIDAAFOJ? *What Should I Do As A Follower Of Jesus?* But, then, that would be hard to get on a wrist band, probably. But to answer this question, we need to know as much as we can about Jesus, so read the gospels, but then we need to be open to him so we can allow his spirit to flow through our personalities. We can never be just like Jesus, but we can live so that people catch a glimpse of him through us and perhaps be able to respond on their own to Jesus’ call to, “Follow me.”