

Come and See

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany (15 January 2012)
Saint John 1:43-51

Dearly beloved, you've asked the question countless times and in numerous ways. Most of the time innocently, seeking sensible answers. Is there anything good on television tonight? Is there anything good in the fridge for lunch tomorrow? Is there anything good we can get Mom for her birthday? But sometimes the question is asked cynically, skeptically, even sarcastically. Can anything good come out of Washington DC and the clowns we've elected as our leaders?

In today's Holy Gospel, Nathanael is struggling with the same sort of cynicism. His friend Philip has come to him with some incredible news. **“We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”**

Nathanael is a devout Jew who knows his Old Testament Scriptures. He knows the promises God has given to His people. Unlike the majority of his countrymen, who were Jews by blood only, Nathanael shares the same faith and hope as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He awaits the promised Seed of the woman, the Prophet foretold by Moses, great David's greater Son, the One to shepherd God's people Israel. He is part of the faithful remnant waiting for God to fulfill His promises and send the Messiah. That's why Nathanael is confused. How can the One of whom Moses and prophets wrote be from Nazareth? Nazareth is not even mentioned in the Old Testament. Not once. What's more, Nathanael's hometown of Cana was less than ten miles from Nazareth. He knew that no one important ever came from Nazareth. No caesars. No olympic gold medalists. Not even a winning little league team. Thus, his question: **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”**

How many times have you asked yourself similar questions concerning your day to day struggles?

Can anything good come out of this sickness, this disease, these aches and pains?

Can anything good come out of tighter finances, losing my job, working multiple jobs to make ends meet?

Can anything good come out of these fights with my spouse, these problems with my children, these disagreements with my friends?

Can anything good come out of my trials and tribulations?

Philip will not be the one to convince Nathanael that something good—indefinitely good—has come out of Nazareth. That’s why his response to Nathanael’s question is so beautiful: **“Come and see.”** See for yourself. Listen to His preaching. See, by God’s grace, how it is completely in line with all of God’s words and promises. **“Come and see.”**

As a side note, if you want to see how easy and matter-of-fact true evangelism is, look to Philip. The joy of being found by Christ moves Philip to tell a friend the good news. When his friend questions this good news, Philip simply points him to Christ and says: **“Come and see.”** Philip does not attempt to argue his friend into the faith. Nor does he dumb down doctrine to make it more palatable to him. Simply: **“Come and see.”** Do you suppose there’s something you and I can learn from this?

Sure enough, Nathanael joins Philip and off they go to see Jesus. But before Nathanael sees Jesus, Jesus sees him and says: **“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”** Dumbfounded, Nathanael asks: **“How do You know me?”** To which Jesus responds: **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”** Jesus saw Nathanael. Not only under the fig tree, while yet out of sight. But right to the very core of his being. Jesus saw that Nathanael was a true Israelite, a true child of Abraham, one who was waiting for God’s Messiah. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Nathanael answers Jesus with a beautiful creed: **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”**

Then, comes the finale, the crown jewel of today’s Holy Gospel. For, in essence, Jesus tells Nathanael: You haven’t seen anything yet! **“You will see greater things than these. ... Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”**

While Nathanael had no way of knowing everything our Lord meant by those words, he understand their starting point. For long ago the patriarch Jacob had fallen asleep with his head on a stone, and dreamed of a ladder connecting heaven and earth. Angels were ascending and descending that ladder, and the LORD stood above it. There the LORD promised Jacob: **“In your Offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed”** (Genesis 28:14).

Nathanael was now seeing and hearing Jacob's Offspring, the promised Messiah. What's more, Nathanael would go on to see and hear Jesus as He preached and taught, as He healed and performed miracles, as He instituted a new and better meal, and most importantly, as He took upon Himself the sin of the world and suffered and died in humanity's place. There, on the cross, heaven was opened. First, so that God's wrath for sin could be poured out full strength on His own dear Son. And second, so that you would once again have access to your heavenly Father, for Christ's atoning sacrifice opens heaven for every sinner. Jesus' cross, you see, is the true ladder that connects heaven and earth. It's also why God's angels—His messengers of the Gospel—point to it, proclaim it, and preach it the world over.

Friends, for all those times in which you have questioned God's love during times of trial and tribulation, repent. The same is true of your doubt, your skepticism, your idols, anything and everything that takes your eyes and your mind and your heart off of your Savior. Repent and look to Christ, for He is good and merciful.

As it turns out, Nathanael, something good—infinately good—came out of Nazareth. And because Jesus Christ is with you and for you, something good can indeed come out of your sickness, your financial pressures, your strained relationships, your hardships. Among the good that can come is prayer, a refining of your faith, and a renewed trust in the God who works all things for your eternal good. And last, but not least, He who is infinitely good brings about something very good today through simple water, words, bread and wine. For these are the very means through which Jesus sees you, finds you, calls you, forgives you, feeds you, strengthens you, and gives you His perfect righteousness.

As Philip said to Nathanael, so I say to you: *Come and see* your Savior, today and every Lord's Day. Come and see Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophet wrote. Come and see Him who stretched out His arms on the cross to embrace you with His unconditional love. Come and see Him who washed you clean, Him who speaks words of life to you, Him who feeds you with Himself that He might abide in you and you in Him.

Someone good—eternally good—is here, today, for you. *Come and see!*

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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