

Epiphany 2B  
John 1:43-51  
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January 14, 2018

### Come and See

You may notice that all our Christmas things have also been put away. Even the manger scene is gone after the three Magi successfully appeared last week. We're now in a season when we explore within the Holy Scriptures those early manifestations of Christ, the time when those around Jesus begin to perceive the truth of who he is.

On this second Sunday after the Epiphany our lectionary always includes a gospel lesson from John — that fourth gospel that's just a bit different. This gospel is where things tend to happen all at once, as if John is presenting to us the whole truth about Jesus in every encounter, pushing us to recognize Jesus as Teacher, Messiah, Son of God, and King.

In some years we hear the story of the wedding in Cana and Jesus turning water into wine. Other times, we hear about John the Baptist describing the descent of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, followed by the call of the first disciples, Andrew and Simon Peter.

But this year we hear about the call of Philip and Nathanael and this story is a little strange. We don't know much about Nathanael. He's not one of the disciples of the inner circle. But after making a somewhat snarky remark about nothing good ever coming from Nazareth, Nathanael somehow jumps to the conclusion that Jesus must be the Son of God, the King of Israel, all because Jesus tells him he saw him under a fig tree. How did he get there?

John's gospel doesn't explain the specifics of why this happened, although in the text we can find a few clues. During this time, the Jewish community was anticipating the coming of the Messiah and those seeking to understand Scripture and better recognize the signs of God's work in the world would often seek a Rabbi to teach them and it was common for a rabbi to literally teach his students under a fig tree. So this phrase, *under a fig tree*, can be understood as metaphoric language telling us that Nathanael is one of those seekers: someone who wants to know God and see God's promises put into action in the world. His heart is open — open to listening, to discerning, to finding the one sent by God who will help set things right in the world.

So when Nathanael receives that invitation to come and see, even if it's to see someone from Nazareth, the lowliest of all places, he still responds — for there is a possibility that Jesus, son of Joseph, could be the one spoken of by Moses and the prophets.

When Jesus tells Nathanael that he knows him, Nathanael has his own enlightening "aha" moment, his own epiphany. And epiphanies transform people — like lighting a candle in a windowless room in the dead of night — suddenly you're able to see.

Nathanael realizes that Jesus knows him completely as only God can truly know God's own creation. This is the kind of knowing that is described in today's psalm, Psalm 139, one of my favorites:

Lord, you have searched me out and known me;  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You trace my journeys and my resting-places  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,  
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

Jesus knows us. Jesus knows the true identity of each and every one of us, and this is not just a knowing of the head, but a knowing from the heart — an intimate understanding of who we are and what we can become through our own unique gifts, given to us by God.

For he created our inmost parts;  
knit us together in our mother's womb  
and we have each been marvelously made.

Jesus knows us and invites us to Come and See, reaching out to us to be in relationship with him. And it's within this relationship, this connection, that we can discover God's path for us, for like Nathanael, we too are part of the New Israel: a people called and set apart by God, transformed by the Spirit to carry Christ's light into the world in a new way, through love, forgiveness, and healing reconciliation.

This is not the path the disciples expected, nor an easy path for us in our own time. We too live in a divisive world, a world that encourages us to look out for ourselves alone and not care for those that come from those lowly places like Nazareth, or Syria, or El Salvador or the wrong side of the tracks; a world that can seem to encourage us to turn away from those don't look like us, or sound like us, or act like us; or sets us at such odds with those we disagree with, that we're unable to have civil conversations and reasonably discuss problems in order to find solutions for the complex issues and concerns that surround us.

But as Christ-followers, our path is different. We are called to love God and our neighbor, to seek to serve Christ in all persons, and respect the dignity of every human being.

Rob Wright, our Bishop here in Atlanta, has a weekly posting on social media called For Faith. Some of you may receive it. This week's posting included some words from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, which is especially appropriate, as tomorrow we recognize and celebrate the life and achievements of this preacher, teacher, and civil rights leader who strived for justice in our country. I want to share these words from Dr. King's 1967 speech, "Where Do We Go From Here?" delivered at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta. Dr. King said:

I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. And I'm not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. For I have seen too much hate... hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.

It's a message as relevant to us today and it was over 50 years ago. Jesus calls us, invites us, to Come and See. Come and see what it means to live into God's love by carrying Christ's light into the world through in all we say and do. Come and see that there is another way to live in the world.

Here at Holy Spirit, we're beginning an exciting time in our journey as a people of faith, to discern in community our strengths, gifts, and talents. And I expect that we, too, like Nathanael, may encounter, our own "aha moments," our own epiphanies, of how we are uniquely called to walk with Christ. It's a program called Asset-Based Community Development, ABCD, and we see this as a way to better understand our own gifts and passions, and over time, the gifts, strengths, and resources within the neighboring community, allowing us to align ourselves and move forward together beyond these walls, guided and transformed by the Spirit, towards a more positive future together.

So be prepared to respond to a call from someone asking to talk to you about your gifts. Come and See. Discern with us. Share your ideas, your gifts, and strengths, as together we seek to learn how we are uniquely called as a community of faith to serve our living God. For together, we can turn away from the divisiveness around us and instead, with God's help, live into the hope that we will see greater things and new life, as we discover fresh ways to carry Christ's light into the world.