

Second Sunday After Epiphany B  
Annunciation of Our Lady, Gurnee (1 / 14 / 18)

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Man, what is up with Nazareth? Everybody in this Scripture is throwing shade on that town!

Here is Nathaniel, and his buddy Phillip says, "We have seen the Messiah. He is from Nazareth." And Philip says, in essence, "Seriously? Nazareth?"

This is kind of the equivalent of Dan Whipple coming up to Bill Hagan and saying, "We've seen the best quarterback of all time and he's from Green Bay." Bill's response would be, "Really? Green Bay?"

And when Jesus hears that Nathaniel said "nothing good can come from Nazareth" his response is, "there's a man who speaks the truth!"

So, Nathaniel is called to meet the man that everyone says is the son of God.

And he's skeptical.

Its understandable.

From the fall of the first temple in 720BCE through the early 30's AD, which is when this text is set, there were literally dozens of people coming forward saying that they were the messiah. Some of them were obscure and some we quite renowned and in every case they were proven to be charlatans either by the people in the community or by the authorities.

So, when Nathaniel is told, "this is the real thing," we can understand his skepticism.

But when Nathaniel meets Jesus, when he speaks to him, he is instantly convinced.

And not just convinced, converted.

He goes from zero to sixty in one minute.

From "can anything good come from Nazareth?" to "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

And what is the catalyst for this monumental change?

What is the magical thing that Jesus did that convinced Nathaniel?

He saw him under a fig tree.

Jesus saw him.

That's all.

It doesn't seem like much. "I saw you when you were just being you" doesn't seem like much.

But it is, in fact, everything.

Elizabeth recently shared with me an article called “How to Change your Life in One Second Flat.”

You’re a little skeptical, aren’t you? I was.

How many times do we see click bait like this and completely ignore it?

We’ve been down this path before, its going to be an article telling me that I am one avocado facial scrub away from resolving all my neurosis.

But you know, if Elizabeth sends it to you, well, you give it a look.

She never sends me anything I don’t find useful.

So, Elizabeth recommends it and I open it.

And the subtitle, under [“How to Change Your life in One Second Flat”](#) is “Four Questions We are All Unconsciously Asking Each Other Nearly All the Time.”

And I read the article and I am convinced.

Not just convinced, I am changed by it.

Does this sound familiar? I was skeptical? I was jaded?

I followed because I trusted Elizabeth?

And I was not just convinced but converted?

So the premise of the article is that whenever we are interacting with one another there are four questions that we are silently and unconsciously asking of one another.

I am asking them of you and you are asking them of me.

And how we answer, verbally, physically, emotionally, how we answer one another is crucial.

It can change everything.

Here are the four questions.

1. Do you see me?
2. Do you care that I’m here?
3. Am I enough for you, or do you need me to be better in some way?
4. Can I tell that I’m special to you by the way that you look at me?

The article explains that we all need to feel “seen.”

We all need to feel that the people in our lives recognize not just our presence but our intrinsic value, our human dignity.

That is what is meant by “do you see me?”

It doesn’t seem like much but we miss it all the time.

How often do you go through an entire morning getting from point A to point B and never actually stop and look directly at someone?

Not just check to see that what they are wearing is appropriate for the weather or the school dress code,

but look right at them, in the face, stop and see them.

And with that look communicate that you care that they are here, that they are enough just as they are and that they are special.

It takes a certain amount of effort.

You have to remember to do it. The author of the article suggests that you save an image of the number 4 – for the four questions – on your phone as the wall paper so that you remember to try to do it for a week.

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It is so simple, right? So obvious and intuitive. But it is really powerful.

It converted Nathaniel. All he had to hear from Jesus was “I saw you.” He looked into Jesus eyes and the evidence was there.

That Jesus loved him.

That he cared that he was here

That he was already perfect and did not need to be better

And that he was special to God.

And in that moment, that moment of being seen, Nathaniel is not just convinced, he’s converted.

He does not just let his guard down. He is *changed*.

I know a little something about this. And so do you.

When I came here a year ago – almost exactly a year ago – I was a person discerning a call to ordained leadership in our church.

I had been given the green light by a committee of random people from across the diocese and sent here to be “formed” as a leader.

From the moment I walked in this door, you welcomed me. You came up to me in the cloister and introduced yourself. I remember Debbie Rakestraw explaining the whole Deb problem to me.

You accepted me – Cindy Hibbard and I had a lovely warm conversation on the couches in my early days.

Maggie Attiyeh let me sit in on her confirmation classes, and I am telling you now, if you have a chance to renew your faith with Maggie, take it, she is great.

The list goes on and on. Samantha Robison’s welcoming smile, Sue Whipple’s hugs, Dan’s for that matter. Michael Chatlien’s super perceptive and thoughtful insights during adult formation. One of the most interesting coffee conversations ever with Mike Bill.

Over the course of the time I have been here, you have formed me.

You have seen me.

You have made me feel important, adequate,

You have affirmed in me a call to the priesthood.

To be sure, Elizabeth did a lot of heavy lifting.

She took calls and texts at all hours.

She explained things to me that were so simple and obvious and I just didn’t get it.

She has spent literally hours – the number could easily be a hundred hours – mentoring me.

At one point last spring, I had an assignment in a liturgy class in which I had to do the Eucharist prayer. You know when she starts with “the Lord be with you... it is right and a good and joyful thing, etc.” And I was straight up terrified.

So Elizabeth, after a full nine to five day and then a Vestry meeting that ran over time, so its now close to ten PM, Elizabeth agrees to help me practice.

Now, she doesn’t take out a random pitcher and a red plastic cup for this rehearsal. No, she turns on the lights in the nave, she gets out the paten and the goblet and all the pieces. And she had me put on the chasuble – the big ornate poncho that the priest wears when doing this.

And we run through it.

Four times.

Elizabeth is sitting there right there, and I am up here doing that whole long prayer – and believe me its longer than it seems when you’re up there – FOUR times.

And because she is Elizabeth, she occasionally yells out, “Hey what are you doing with your other hand other there? What’s that?”

When all was said and done she probably got home after eleven pm.

She took the time, not just this time but over and over, to see me, to make me feel valued and adequate and to form me in my ordained leadership in the church.

So when Nathaniel meets Jesus, he is convinced simply by the words “I saw you.”

And not just convinced: changed, altered for the rest of his life.

He becomes a disciple.

“I saw you when you were just being you” it doesn’t seem like much.

But it is, in fact, everything.

In my time at Annunciation of Our Lady, you have lived this scripture.

(Not the “can anything good come from Gurnee part”)

You have embodied these four questions.

You do it for one another every day.

You did it for me and it changed me from a postulant needing formation into an ordained leader in the church.

You did that. That’s the charism of this congregation, the special talent of this community.

Every day you “see” one another in ways that really, genuinely matter.

And when you do, you know Christ, in yourselves and each other.

There isn’t a way to do this, and it’s too bad.

But I wish that you could see you, the way I see you.

I wish you could see you through my eyes.

As a person who has seen almost every congregation in the entire diocese.

I see you.

I am – the church is – blessed that you are here.

You are already, magnificently, doing the transformational work of the Gospel. You are good enough.

You are beyond special in my eyes.

I know you to be the Body of Christ.

And thank you.

Amen.