

January 17, 2021, the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)
I Saw You!

John 1:43-51

⁴³The next day, (*after Jesus recruited Andrew and Simon Peter*), Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you come to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

While visiting friends in Albuquerque they suggested a trip to one of the oldest continuously populated towns in what would become the United States, Sky City. The village is part of the Acoma Pueblo situated atop a mesa with an amazing view all around, but their ancestors weren't there for scenery. They went up there for protection from marauders and jealous neighbors. Now the tribe boasts a wonderful visitors center and guided tours of the pueblo. Today's marauders come armed with cameras and are tolerated with some grace. Our guide shared something about the Acoma language that has sparked much thought. When us English speakers encounter folks we know there are a number of greetings such as hello, hey there, how ya doin'? For Acoma speakers no such greetings exist. On coming across a neighbor or friend they say, "I see you." This is followed by a description of what the person is doing while they are observed. So, "I see you coming out of your door," or "I see you hoeing your garden." The guide told us how important it is to be seen. In a close knit society if you are not recognized by the community it makes you call your existence into question. In other words I am

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nothing until someone sees me. I suppose hide and seek might be a traumatic game to play if while hiding you question your existence.

This may be a well thought out aspect of Acoma culture but it has universal application for all humans. We are social creatures whose ancestors survived by banding together and making communities. One of the great unexplored tragedies of our social distancing is that we are not being seen. Infected with this notion I've occasionally succumbed when spending too much time alone to the thought that maybe I'm not really here. As a folklore fan I am familiar with the idea that spirits of the departed are perplexed that they can't get anyone's attention. It would be a cruel fate for us humans to be unseen by anyone. Through the marvels of the internet even those who are isolated have a chance to see and be seen by others. We have all been witness to family members gathering outside the windows of vulnerable people, or maybe you have been on one side or the other of that window. We try to find the next best thing to being seen.

When the epidemic eases I pray we will not forget to look at one another, spend time acknowledging the existence of even strangers. I thought I was doing ok with that until attending a Presbyterian General Assembly in Richmond, Virginia, where total strangers accosted me on the street saying, "mornin' " It's not possible to be alone in a crowd of Virginians. This brings me to the other side of being seen. When Adam and Eve figured out they were guilty as sin the first thing they did after the fig leaf kilts was to hide themselves from view. God saw them anyway. In fact if God were to actually look away from you it's the end of your existence. The only way to balance the need to be seen with the desire to hide our sins is confession. It isn't like God doesn't know what

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you did, but your acknowledgment allows God in to bring about healing and strengthens you to find ways not to do IT again.

I'm never sure what is best to say to people who think they are hiding things like family sins. Something like alcoholism and the damage it causes to families is common enough that it is truly no secret. Maintaining a front as if other families are perfect and you are the only group to have such problems doesn't help the "perfect" family either. Things will go on generation after generation if there is a conspiracy of silence. God sees, God knows and those of us who are honest may say, "well I didn't do that but I have done a lot that makes me want to hide."

Did Jesus miraculously see Nathaniel like some psychic visionary? Did he happen to walk by when Nathaniel wasn't looking? Either way the true miracle is that Jesus saw Nathaniel, the whole man and still he welcomed his company. There's the miracle.

Closing prayer: Almighty God, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world. May your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, shine with the radiance of his glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.