

January 7, 2018
Come & See
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John 1:35-51

[The First Disciples of Jesus]

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

[Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael]

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip 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." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And 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."

If your mama or daddy ever said, "I seen what you done and I know what you're up to," was that good news or bad? Did it prompt fear and anxiety? Or relief and joy? Jesus wasn't telling Nathaniel that he "saw what he done" so much as, *I know what you were up to. I know what you were praying for. I've always known. And here I am.*

Because knowing that a holy man was probably under a fig tree is something like knowing that Kelley School of Business professors can be found at Lennie's on Friday afternoons. It is what they do. Holy men pray under fig trees; it's what they do. Nathaniel, naturally, was struck down. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel."

Struck down in that he spit out treason like it's nothing in the world to him if Roman soldiers hear him say it, "Son of God" and "King of Israel" being titles reserved for the Emperor, not Galileans. Struck down that a man knows about himself not just what everyone else knows, but what is in his heart and mind.

Two sentences earlier Nathaniel himself insulted Jesus. “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” — Nathaniel asks the air, the way folks do when we believe everyone in the room agrees with us. Nathaniel was Judean. Judeans thought themselves better Jews in general than Galileans. More racially pure, more sacrificial. More devout.

Not unlike American white people.

Once when I was a child my grandmother was looking at the school pictures of my cousin’s kids and she said, “*Somebody in that bunch jumped the fence.*”

It was her not-so-subtle racist description of an interracial child. Her own great-grandchildren, mind you. But I had no idea what she meant, so I asked my mother. My mother having to explain was worse than hearing Mamaw say it. Yet I loved them both, cringes and all.

But can you and I say we don’t have our own Nazareths? People or places or parties we’ve written off; dismissed; decided are not worth a look or listen?

Can anything good come out of _____ ? What? Surely you can fill the blank.

The White House . . . Congress . . . the Republican Party . . . the Democratic Party . . . the Southern Baptist Convention . . . the Evangelical Church . . . Sudan . . . North Korea . . . Alabama . . . the IU men’s basketball program. Come and see, Philip answered. But he was not the first to say so. Jesus was.

When Andrew and his friend (both disciples of John the Baptist) heard Jesus speaking, they wanted to hear more. *Where are you staying?* they want to know. *Come and see*, Jesus said. This word for *staying* is important for John. Elsewhere it gets translated *abide*. *Abide in me as I abide in you* is nearly the whole message of John 15 as well as the pastoral letters of John. But Jesus doesn’t say *I abide in you* here in chapter 1. That would have been too creepy. It wasn’t time yet. He cannot tell them; he can only show them. *Come and see*. And so they peel away from John the Baptist to follow Jesus. Too bad for preachers, John the Baptist isn’t our role model: the more disciples he lost, the better job he was doing. Andrew and this other fellow listen for a day, and Andrew finds his brother Simon, whom Jesus renames *Peter*.

Off, the four of them head to Andrew and Peter’s hometown in Galilee, where Jesus finds Philip, and Philip finds Nathaniel. Here’s when Nathaniel insults Jesus. And Philip bids him *come and see*.

But before Nathaniel can open his mouth, Jesus shouts a greeting. “*Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!*” Did Jesus just insult most of Israel? As if this is an unusual thing to see – an honest Israelite. If I had a quarter for all the times people have said to me, “*Wow, you don’t look like a preacher,*” I could buy new shoes – **nice** new shoes.

The thing is, I can’t tell whom they are insulting – or complimenting. So I just say “*thank you.*” What is Jesus doing here?

He is doing, it seems to me, what Jesus always does, welcoming whoever is willing to come and see. Nathaniel isn't hiding anything from Jesus. Jesus knows him through and through, his devotion AND his bigotry.

Nathaniel is just one human being, and when he comes to Jesus he comes as a whole package. Coming to Jesus, he is not instantly free of his past – as Judean, as Jew, as a male. Or any of all the bits and pieces of his history that make him who he is now. And Jesus takes him all. I love how Jesus acts the gospel out in the minutiae of a conversation. How he flexes his thick skin and his tender heart simultaneously.

Nathaniel has just insulted Jesus. But not just Jesus himself: Jesus' kinfolk and his hometown.

Now I know Christian people who could not get past that. They'd get offended. They'd have to talk it out – talk about nothing else until that was worked out.

Not Jesus. In response to insult, Jesus chooses to praise Nathaniel's great faith. Friends, let it not be lost on us that Jesus will bid these same disciples – AND US – to come and die with him. And here is his first lesson: *Let other people's insults die; when others insult you, let those insults fall into silence – silence deeper than a grave.* As for me, I'm perfectly capable of receiving an insult without returning fire . . . out loud. Instead, I like to absorb the insult and nurse it like a wound, until it festers and infects the relationship. Which, I suspect, is not exactly the lesson Jesus was trying to teach. So yeah, I have some room to grow on letting insults die.

While Jesus, apparently, has better things to do, like turn these men (and, eventually, women) into friends and partners in the work he is setting out to do: saving humanity from sin and death. Go figure.

“How do you know me?”

“I saw you under the fig tree. Not just what you were doing. I saw every nook and cranny of your heart. I know what you are up to. Here I am.”

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.”

Nathaniel's confession of Jesus as Messiah is John's first proclamation of the gospel by a human being, a doubter who was a little bit racist.

Nathaniel may have thought his day couldn't get better, when Jesus, like every game show host ever, says, “But wait – that's not all! *Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man!*”

Whose vision is Jesus recalling? We read it early back in the fall. In this “*lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,*” Jacob's vision has come to pass. Remember the stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending? Only now, there is no stairway. The Son of God has replaced the very road between heaven and earth.

“*You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man!*” is language that will eventually get him killed by far more powerful men than these four, these men from No-place, Galilee. And yet, of all the people in all the world

whom Jesus might have chosen, these are the folks God chose as friends and partners in the most important work anybody ever did this side of heaven: rescue folks from sin and death.

Jesus finds them. They find their friends. Jesus welcomes all of them to “*come and see.*” *Come and see* the one who “seen what you did.” *Come and see* the one who “knows what you're up to.” *Come and see* the one who invites you to imagine that such a thing can be ALL good news.