

Epiphany 2 B—January 18, 2009
Church of the Reformation—Lutheran, Affton, MO
Text: John 1:43—51

Come and See

Today's Gospel reading involves some familiar people: Jesus, Philip, Andrew, Peter, Nathanael, also known in the other Gospels as Bartholomew. And if you look earlier in John, chapter 1, you also see John the Baptizer and his disciples. Looking closer at this chapter you will see that it covers four days in John's Day Planner.

On the **first day, Day 1**, (John 1:19-28), the Pharisees had sent priests and Levites to John the Baptizer, who was at the Jordan River, preaching and baptizing. These scouts were sent by the Pharisees to test John and to see what he was all about. John was all too happy to tell them that he was about giving testimony to the Greater One who was coming.

The **next day, Day 2**, (John 1:29—34), seeing Jesus approaching, John the Baptizer identified Jesus and His mission with the words, "**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" John bore witness that Jesus is the Greater One foretold. He told how he had baptized Jesus.

The **next day, Day 3** (John 1:35—42), John the Baptizer was standing with two of his disciples, Andrew and another John, when Jesus came by. Once again John identified Jesus, "**Behold, the Lamb of God!**" With that, the two disciples followed Jesus, even to the point of asking the Master where He was staying. Jesus answers, "**Come and you will see.**" After spending the rest

of that day with Jesus, Andrew found his brother Peter and said, **“We have found the Messiah,”** and took him to Jesus.

Finally, the **next day , Day 4**, of today’s text (John 1:43—51), Jesus is on His way to Galilee, He finds Philip, confiscates his life with **“Follow Me.”** Philip then finds Nathanael and begins reciting his apostle’s creed, **“We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”**

In answer to Philip, Nathanael gives one of the best put-down lines ever, **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** It’s hard to be a put-down, though, if you are speaking the truth.

Nazareth isn’t mentioned once in the Old Testament or the Apocrypha. It’s not in one of the better areas of Galilee. A town like Nazareth makes it difficult for the local Chamber of Commerce to come up with an advertising campaign to win over tourists. Nazareth is a one-donkey town from the wrong side of the tracks.

But who is the object of Nathanael’s put-down? On the surface it looks like he’s painting a big “L” for Loser on Nazareth’s face. Below that surface, the Nazareth put-down is nothing but an accusing swipe at God.

Nathanael was no dummy; he often sat under the fig tree, reading his Bible, studying the Word of God. As one pastor has put it, Nathanael was reading the Bible **“as a manual on how to be a good god”** (Nagel, p. 43). He knew there were things a good god should do, places where a good god should be, and places from where a good god should come. Nazareth was not the answer to any of these.

Nor is Nathanael alone in this way of thinking. It's only been a few days since we heard of how **"wise men from the east came to Jerusalem"** to see Him **"who has been born king of the Jews?"** (Matthew 2:1-2). In their mind, if there is a king to be found, it would certainly be in a palace. With directions to Bethlehem in hand, the old gods of the magi died; when the wise men entered **"the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother and they fell down and worshiped Him,"** and they died to themselves and to their old ways and were reborn to a living faith in the Redeemer of the world.

Death and rebirth were necessary for Nathanael as well. The God who could do nothing for Nazareth had to die; while the God who can do everything for Nazareth had to be born for him, born in a little town of Bethlehem and then raised as a child in Nazareth. This may not have been Nathanael's plan or ours, for that matter, but it was and is God's plan.

More wise men than shepherds, we think we have a good handle on God. We have our standards He has to meet; we have our lists for Him to do, the problems we need solved, the cancers we need cured, the jobless days, weeks, and years for which we need Him to provide. Like Job and his advisors, like Jonah and other prophets, like the wise men and Nathanael, we know how a good god is to act. A good god would never come from Nazareth, nor would He be born in a stable nor flee as a refugee. But that is exactly what this good God does!

Philip believes this good God and knows there is nothing more persuasive of Jesus than Jesus Himself. **"Philip said to [Nathanael], 'Come and see.'"** Jesus *saw* Nathanael coming toward Him and said, **"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."** It's

not a matter of Nathanael seeing Jesus, but that Jesus of Nazareth sees Nathanael and accepts him. Nathanael *is seen*—by Jesus! And *then* he comes and sees Jesus of Nazareth. Soon another voice joins the Apostles' Creed, **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”**

Rabbi, Son of God, King of Israel—all titles Nathanael ascribes to Jesus; yet Jesus speaks of Himself as the *Son of Man*, the title that connects Jesus to each of us, to all human beings. Son of Man is the title Jesus uses when, during Holy Week, He speaks of His death on the cross, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** The crowd that day pushed the point: **“We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can You say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son Man?”** (John 12:23, 34). A few days later they would see their answer inscribed on the cross by Pilate, **“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”** (John 19:19). Nathanael had wanted no Christ who would come from Nazareth, let alone one who dies on a cross, one enthroned on a cross. Yet it was on the cross that we and Nathanael would see the greater thing of Christ paying the price of our sin, even our sin of trying to make Him into another kind of god.

Make no mistake about it: Jesus sees us, no matter where our fig tree is; He sees us in our sin, in our unbelief and doubt, in our hesitation, and He forgives. While we may not place much worth on what comes from towns such as Parkers Prairie, Cape Girardeau, or even Affton, yet Jesus of Nazareth with His death and resurrection sees us and places great value on us—His love. And if we are ever in doubt, Christ has His servants in the pulpit, at the confession and absolution, at the table of the Lord, saying, **“Come and see. Taste and see that the Lord is good!”** (Psalm 34:8).

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