

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

What will it take to impress you?

We live in a time when we are not easily impressed. We are exposed to the most extreme examples of human accomplishments and natural phenomena through the media that assaults us. While virtually all of us lead rather normal lives, it is easy for us to come to know about the world records – the fastest, biggest, most, smallest, most frequent, brightest, darkest – you name it. We may be amused or entertained by the world's longest banana split or the world's largest ball of twine.

Jesus was able to tell a man where he had been – under the fig tree. He had not seen Jesus walk by or looking on from a distance. Jesus knew where he was because the Son of God knows everything. He is able to be every place at the same time, and there is no place that is off limits to him.

Nathanael was impressed. He was genuinely impressed. Jesus had shown him something that he had never seen before. Jesus knew where he was without the aid of a spy satellite or a video surveillance camera. Jesus was able to not only see where Nathanael was, but he was able to look right through his clothing, and through his skin, into his

heart and mind. Jesus knew that he was a sinner, and that his sins separated him from God. Jesus knew that those sins needed to be forgiven, and Jesus knew that his suffering and death would pay the price to redeem him from sin.

Jesus invited Nathanael to follow him, and he would come to know that the interest Jesus had in him was not that of a busy body, and it wasn't just curiosity. Jesus invited Nathanael to follow him because Jesus cared about him. Jesus wanted him to live a new life in the time he still had on earth. Jesus wanted him to enjoy eternal life in heaven with all the others who have heard the gentle invitation of Jesus to follow him.

Philip remarked to his friends that the remarkable subject of their conversation was someone they already knew. It was the Jesus whom Moses wrote about in the Law. As devout Jews, they were familiar with what Moses wrote in the law. There were copies of Moses five books – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – available for reading and discussion in the local synagog and in the large temple in Jerusalem. They did not have their own personal copies of Moses' writings, and it probably took them a long time to hear or discuss all of what Moses had written, but they knew it well enough to refer to it, and they had a common knowledge base to refer to.

What did they know that we don't? Can you open your Bible and find Jesus in the first five books of the Old Testament? You won't find the name JESUS any place. But they knew him to be there. They understood that at the creation, when God said "Let us make man in our image" that one of those in US was the Son of God. When God spoke to Eve after the fall into sin, and told her that there would be tension and warfare between the devil's forces and her offspring, they understood that Eve's special descendent would be the promised one who would someday defeat Satan, despite the battle and the suffering. When Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole, the people did not die from the snake bites they had suffered. Philip understood that this was a symbol and a prophecy of the Savior who would be put on a pole.

These men received an invitation to follow Jesus, and Jesus was to them the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies.

Nathanael was excited to hear about Jesus – until he heard that Jesus had come from Nazareth. It was true. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He spend some time in Egypt as a little child. But his parents came back and settled in Nazareth – just a wide place in the road, a backwater of a small town which had no claim to fame.

Nathanael asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth. Up to that point, the answer was ZERO. Nothing. Nada. There probably was something that came out of Nazareth, but it sure wasn't GOOD.

We too assume connections between significant people and significant origins. We expect that good people come from good families in nice places. We assume that troubled and worthless people come from places like Las Vegas or New Orleans where anything goes.

Can anything good come from your hometown, your neighborhood? Do people expect it, or are they surprised if it does? Where are you from? You never heard of it. You'd never expect anything or anybody important to come out of it.

No one would have looked to Nazareth to be the hometown of the Son of God. No one expected God to live there next to people who swelled the population with half-breeds.

Yet he did. Jesus grew into manhood and prepared for his ministry in Nazareth. It was an unlikely launching pad. I think that Jesus was proud of his hometown, just as we are of ours. He knew it to be filled with his friends and neighbors. He knew it to be filled with people in need of his ministry and in need of the forgiveness of sins that he would pay for by his blood.

Jesus saw Nathanael while he was still under the fig tree. He could do that because he is both in the present and in the future. We are drawn to someone with knowledge of the future. We desire the power of knowing the future. We think that it is to our advantage to know the future, so that we could select the winning lottery number or pick the stock that will go through the ceiling and never come down.

The Lord who is already in the future tells his follower that he will see greater things than that – he will see more impressive things that knowing in the future who will be under what tree. The followers of Jesus will see the miracle of conversion. It may happen in our family or in our church, or we may come to know about it from others. It is a remarkable and wondrous thing. Have you known or seen someone who has come to faith? In the Lutheran church, where we practice infant baptism, we don't see it so often. Many of us came to faith as babies, and we have known Jesus of Nazareth as Savior and Lord all of our lives. But there are others who come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior much later in their lives, and when they do, they experience the miracle of conversion, and we can only marvel at the grace of God shared with another person who deserved it no more and no less than I.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, one by one, a life is changed. We will see the fruits of the spirit in the lives of people. When that happens, we praise God for witnessing what another child of God does in gratitude and thankfulness. We can be inspired by the lives, by the service, by the good deeds done by people like us who come from insignificant places like ours.

Yes, we will too see greater things than what Jesus knew. We will experience eternal life in God's presence. Having heard the gracious invitation of the Savior to follow him, by the grace of God we follow him all the way into eternity. It is an invitation that we should NOT refuse.

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