

Second Weekend After Epiphany (RCL/B)
1 Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51
January 16-17, 2021
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Things we wished we hadn't said.... A good rule of thumb I think we'd all agree on is never saying things **about** somebody that we wouldn't say directly **to** them because it's not kind **and** because it's bound to get back to them. This seems relevant because of Nathanael's snarky question to Philip in today's Gospel: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46) 'Reminds me of all those years I lived out of state and would see Midwesterners' look of concern, almost pity, when they asked where I was from and I'd say New Jersey. "Oh...." I could just tell they were picturing what they saw on their quick trip through on the NJ Turnpike or as they landed in Newark and headed directly to New York City.

Philip excitedly tells Nathanael he's found the Messiah, "*Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth,*" (John 1:45) and Nathanael isn't just underwhelmed, he's **more than skeptical** that the answer to a thousand years of his people's waiting and his own prayers hails from a backwater town known for – nothing. He finds out soon thereafter that Jesus is watching him and knows exactly who he is – so I don't think it's jumping to false conclusions that Jesus also hears him comment, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" Oops. Awkward....

But Jesus doesn't let on and shame Nathanael over what he's said – Jesus praises him: "*Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is not deceit!*" (John 1:47, NRSV) or in *The Message* paraphrase, "*There's a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body.*" Jesus knows Nathanael's heart, like He knows our hearts. When He tells Nathanael He "saw" him under

the fig tree, St. John may want us to know that Jesus “sees” his soul and not just his body. Jesus has **insight** into him. In turn, he has insight into Jesus: “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*” (John 1:49) That’s **startling** understanding, coming before Jesus has even performed His first sign in this Fourth Gospel, the changing of water into wine in Cana of Galilee.

The name Nathanael may not be all-that-familiar to you, and for good reason. He’s not mentioned at all in the other 3 Gospels, and he’s only mentioned once more by St. John. In the story of the risen Lord making breakfast on the beach for His friends who are fishing, “Nathanael of Cana in Galilee” (John 21:2) is named among them. That tells us Nathanael did indeed become a follower of Jesus, and was in it for the long haul, appearing in both the first and last chapters of the Fourth Gospel.

Nathanael meets Jesus because his friend Philip invites him to “*Come and see.*” (John 1:46) Philip is echoing what Jesus said a day earlier to two of John the Baptist’s followers who sought Jesus out after John had identified Him as the Lamb of God (John 1:36). Jesus notices these two fellows tailing Him and asks the telling question, “*What are you looking for?*” (John 1:38) Maybe they’re not sure of that themselves because instead of answering they ask, “*Rabbi.... Where are you staying?*” (John 1:38) Instead of pressing them for an answer as to what they’re after, the Lord issues a beautiful invitation: “*Come and see.*” (John 1:39)

That’s perfect evangelism, simply inviting people to “*Come and see.*” It’s much more effective than standing on a street corner reading from the Bible, or pointing out to folks where they’re falling short, or lecturing others on the particulars of our beliefs. “Come and see” let’s others know: a) they will be welcomed in our faith community if they **do** choose

to come; b) we respect their ability to come to their own conclusions; c) we trust the Holy Spirit's power to open the doors of the human heart. None of us appreciates being browbeaten. By contrast, there is genuine respect, there is holy hospitality, there is human warmth in the invitation "*Come and see.*" Hopefully we **do** tell friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, teammates, fellow students, fellow teachers, the difference our faith makes to us. But ultimately they need to experience the difference faith can make to **them**. What better way is there than to worship with us, serve beside us, learn along with us, laugh and cry with us? The gift of a Savior, the gift of faith, the gift of a faith family, can make the difference between hope and despair, can be the difference between life and death, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

I have to thank Ned for once again choosing cover artwork for our worship booklets that reflects the Scripture we've heard but also give us lots to think about. The painting "Calling of the Disciples" is by an artist from Cameroon in Central Africa. Jesus and the disciples He's calling are all depicted as very dark-skinned. (Usually the only dark-skinned people we see in Bible pictures are one of the 3 magi and Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry His cross.) You might think, "Well, that's not very realistic," but neither is a blond-haired Baby Jesus or a blue-eyed Christ! Two points: we all want to see Jesus in our own image, **and** we ourselves are the disciples whom He invites, "*Come and see,*" the ones whom He commands, "*Follow me.*"

In the first mention of John the Baptist's disciples who stalk Jesus, they're anonymous. So is "the beloved disciple" we meet in the Fourth Gospel. There's no mention of the 12 apostles or their names either. The field is wide open for each of us to say, **I** am the disciple Jesus asks, "*What are you looking for?*" **I** am the disciple Jesus invites, "*Come*

and see.” I am the disciple Jesus commands, *“Follow me.”* I am the disciple Jesus commissions to say to **somebody else**, *“Come and see.”*

We’re all responsible for making sure that when someone **accepts** the invitation to “Come and see,” to pray or play, serve or learn with us, they see Jesus here, within and among us. We’re each commissioned to give a holy welcome, to lend a helping hand, to accept others unconditionally as we have been accepted unconditionally. Let’s never forget that people are more apt to judge Christianity by the behavior of Christians than by the behavior of Christ. Let’s remember that others judge not just Christianity but Christ Himself by the behavior of Christians. That’s sobering, when we consider the behavior of those who brandished flags that said, “Jesus saves,” as they assaulted the Capital. It’s scary when we hear that Christian music was heard amid the chants of “Hang Pence!” “Jesus saves” isn’t a sentiment that flies beside the Confederate flag. It’s not just the temple of democracy that was desecrated on January 6. It was the very name of Jesus, co-opted and weaponized by rioters, and the cross of Christ draped with a political flag.

There’s a famous saying that Christians are made, not born. Nobody is **born** a Christian. We become Christians through Holy Baptism, but just as a wedding is the threshold over which we cross into marriage, Baptism is the event which begins but doesn’t complete the “making” of a Christian. We **become** true disciples **over time** as we follow in our Lord Jesus’s footsteps, as we first accept and then offer the invitation to “Come and see.” **True** disciples **make** disciples. The Holy Spirit will open the doors of opportunity. We just need to be willing and courageous enough to walk through. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

