

Second Sunday After the Epiphany
January 14, 2024
Open for Eternity
John 1:43-51

Have you ever talked to a teenager and noticed that sometimes they have a funny way of talking in the present tense?

“So I says to him, “like we’re doing this a’rite?,” and he says to me, “I dunno, we can do whatever,” and I says to him, “Ok whatever let’s skoden, a’rite?”

You probably need to be a teenager to really understand what they are saying, but I think you get the point. It’s a short order form of English that gets to the point quickly and anyone that cares what they are saying understands it.

In our Gospel appointed for the Second Sunday After the Epiphany, John has an interesting way of talking just like a teenager. I know it’s simple Greek he is writing, and that is the most likely reason why, but I could not help but feel there was more to it as Pastor Moore and I translated this passage in our Monday Study Group.

Truly, John speaking between the present and past tense seems to be telling us something important. And I believe it is telling us God is working and happening right now. We know that because He has undeniably worked before. When Jesus says, “Follow me”, He means it now, just like He always has.

Jesus tells Philip to follow Him. And it got me wondering; what is Philip, a resident of Bethsaida all the way up on the other side of the sea of Galilee, doing down here in Judea by the Jordan River? That’s a 70 mile or 4–6 day’s trip by foot! There’s no indication that Philip or Nathanael knew anything about Jesus at this point. And yet, they came here. Nathanael, who was from Cana, and Philip, both now in Judea where they encountered Jesus for the first time.

One can safely surmise they were there to confess their sins. They were there to have their sins washed away. They were there because they were good Galilean Jews, quite distinct from the Judean Jews, as we will see in a moment, and they were exactly where Jesus knew they would be and wanted them to be.

“We got ‘em right where we want ‘em!” That was Keith Bishop, the Guard of the Denver Broncos offensive line, when they found themselves on the 2-yard line with 5 minutes to go, down 13-20. It looked impossible, but miracle after miracle happened with incredible passes

from John Elway. They marched down the field tying the game to send it into over-time, where they would win with a sudden-death field goal.

How many of us can tell miraculous stories where we were right where we needed to be at the right time to get that great price on a washing machine, or to avoid the terrible accident, or stumble onto a raffle that gave out huge prizes? We can probably all tell at least one story that happened to us or someone we know!

But that story is really God's story for you. Because He put us in the story to get the greatest gift of all, before we even knew the gift was for us.

Can anything good come from Nazareth?

Nathanael knew nothing. Well don't get me wrong, he did technically know Nazareth. But he clearly didn't know what goodness was indeed coming.

In our Winkel this week, Pastor Frank Frye told us a hilarious story about a friend at Seminary making fun of his hometown of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He would always give Frank a side eye look, and say, "Aren't you from Oshkosh, Frank?" And Frank would reply, knowing exactly what was coming, "Yes I am."

"Can anything good come from Oshkosh?"

After several time of doing this to Frank in their first two years of Seminary, Frank finally told him, "You know what? You keep making fun of Oshkosh and God is gonna' send you there for your vicarage."

Well, vicarage assignment day came along. Lo and behold, he did get assigned to a church in Oshkosh and Frank was vindicated. But the best part is, he and his wife had their first child while on vicarage in Oshkosh, and they finally had to admit, there is something good that comes from Oshkosh.

I sort of feel that way about Nathanael today. Sure, Nazareth wasn't great, but there was some good from there.

In the midst of his snarkiness towards that humble little town, Philip comes along with simple language that doesn't argue with the snark! And you have to ask yourself, "Who does this?"

How many times has someone dissed something we care dearly for and when they brought the snark, we gave them snark in return?

You can tell Pastor Moore and I are pretty much bros, because we do this all the time to each other. He'll come in the room where we are meeting with other people and will immediately snark at me, "If I knew you were coming, I wouldn't have bothered being here."

I would reply, "Oh yah? Well, if I knew you were coming, I would have made sure the door was locked before you got here!"

No matter what the occasion, no matter who is there, every time we see each other the snark is on, and the goal is to see who can get the best dig in before we have to get down to business.

I don't really do this with anyone else, as I am pretty sure they wouldn't understand the gentle ribbing in fun. In fact, it would probably bring a significant amount of verbal abuse, and rightfully so, if they don't know me. But Philip shows me today that he could handle my snark and disbelief, and truly that is his gift from God. And this is why he was exactly where God wanted him to be, so Nathanael could see what only Jesus could see.

Think about Philip's response to Nathanael's snark. He just got done telling him the best news ever, then got the snarky response, and still loves his friend enough to gently reply, "Come and see!"

Oh, how simply perfect is Philip's response to "Snarky Sammy" Nathanael! It doesn't get down on his level, instead it raises the discourse to where it needs to be. Because Jesus had plans for this man whom He said was without deceit. And, for all Nathanael's snarkiness, he and Philip had one quality the Judean Jews, whom Jesus normally encountered, did not have.

Philip and Nathanael came at Jesus honestly. They didn't have trickery in mind, they didn't try to get Him handed over to the authorities, they didn't try to undermine the loyalty of the people, like the Judeans. No, they listened, and their eyes were opened, and they believed that Jesus was the one! And, in so doing, the Holy Spirit gave them an Epiphany that would make them disciples and apostles until their martyrdom in the late first century.

That revelation was the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. And Jesus with a little hint in the end of today's Gospel, would later reveal to them He was, in fact, God.

Jesus directly quotes the Old Testament of Jacob's dream at Bethel, when his eyes were opened, and he saw exactly what Jesus said would happen to Him, as well.

This is a powerful confirmation that Jesus is Jacob, or better understood, Jesus is Israel reduced to one!

And the greater thing Philip and Nathanael would soon bear witness to, is the very opening of the Temple itself, when its curtain would tear in two and its floor would crack open down the middle. The skies would open and weep over the death of our Savior. Then after being laid in a tomb, having died for the sins of the world, the tomb itself would open. Our Savior Jesus would walk out alive, showing us that He is risen, He is God, and He has opened the Gates of Heaven for all who repent and believe in Him.

Snarky? No. By faith opened to everything Jesus did? Yes.
AMEN.

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