

Sermon, St. David's, 1/14/2024, 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; John 1:43-51
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Last Sunday I spoke to you about the voice of God, which was all over the readings. We hear it again in this morning's readings, in the Old Testament and the Gospel, which both contain call stories. Young Samuel does not realize that it is God who speaks to him until the fourth time God calls. I love that story so much that I chose it as a text for my ordination to the priesthood years and years ago. But I realized that because I love the story so much that when this collection of readings comes up every three years, I always preach from that reading, so this time I really think the Spirit is nudging me to pay some attention to the Gospel of John and the call of Nathanael.

Nathanael, like Samuel, has trouble hearing the voice of God, not because he is young and innocent like Samuel but because he is cynical and doesn't believe anything good can come out of Nazareth.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That line always makes me smile because I recognize modern prejudices there. Can anything good come out of someone who admires Donald Trump, for example? Can anything good come out of the Roman Catholic church? Can anything good come out of people protesting gun rights? Pick your prejudice. We all have them. Nazareth was one of Nathanael's. He was skeptical. We don't know why Nathanael spoke in a derogatory way about Nazareth, but we know it was a small town, so likely considered unimportant.

Then Jesus tells Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree, and Nathanael, startled, declares him the Son of God and King of Israel.

The whole fig tree comment, like the disrespect shown to Nazareth, may be cryptic to us; but clearly Jesus mentioning that he had seen Nathanael under a fig tree made Nathanael realize that yes, something good could in fact come out of Nazareth. His skepticism evaporated.

In this season after the Epiphany, we will hear stories about signs and wonders, and we will hear call stories like these about Samuel and Nathanael. But stories don't end with call. At our upcoming Annual Meeting, I will present some numbers to you, such as how many people were baptized at St. David's in 2023. Baptisms are probably my favorite event as a priest, and they are life-changing life events that call for huge celebrations. But they are the beginning of the story, not the end. One is baptized and grows into their faith. Those who are baptized as young children may choose to become confirmed, confirming the promises made on their behalf when they were too young to speak for themselves.

But confirmation isn't the end, either. Neither is serving on the vestry. Or certainly not ordination. I continue to grow into my discipleship.

Nathanael, Andrew, Peter and Philip are all called by Jesus in this opening chapter of the Gospel of John, but their story doesn't end there. They all continue to grow in faith. They also mess up and then try again, like we do. Because Nathanael had a flash of understanding doesn't mean that all the mysteries of the world had suddenly been revealed to him. He believed and then spent the rest of his life trying to understand. Trying to follow. Learning how to be a disciple.

Last week and this week we heard about the voice of God, but we also have an emphasis on *seeing* this week that I'd like to explore. Jesus telling Nathanael "I *saw* you under the fig tree." Notice that the seeing is what convinces Nathanael, not just the voice. We also hear Philip saying *come and see*. And in today's psalm, we hear about God, "your eyes beheld my limbs."

Do you think of God as having eyes? We know that God is not like us, except in Jesus, when God became one of us and experienced what we experience. Experienced senses in the same way that we humans do. And of course, not all of us experience the same senses. Some don't have eyesight or hearing or a sense of smell, so thinking about God in terms of different senses is important, so that eventually we hit on one that resonates with us.

Regardless of which senses we possess, the words "come and see" are an invitation to deepen our discipleship. Most of you here this morning have been baptized, but that doesn't mean you're fully baked as a Christian. I'm not fully baked as a Christian. We all have things to learn about and from Jesus, and the best way to do that is through community. Through showing up on Sunday mornings, coming to Bible study, bringing a dish to a potluck, taking a meal to someone who just got out of the hospital or helping with the Monday meal at the HomeAgain men's shelter. Nathanael didn't declare Jesus the Son of God and King of Israel and then go home. He dedicated the rest of his life to following Jesus. To being a disciple, alongside other disciples.

In Lent, which begins in a month, we will move with Jesus toward Jerusalem and crucifixion and then Easter and resurrection. Here in the season after Epiphany, however, we have more stories from the beginning of his ministry. We're seeking signs together, listening for the voice of God, but also looking for those invitations to come and see. To follow. To be open to something good coming from a place we would never expect.