

HIDDEN ORIGINS

1 SAMUEL 3:1-10

JOHN 1:43-51

JANUARY 18, 2018

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“THE NEXT DAY...”

Our Gospel reading for this morning begins with the words, “The next day...” It’s like arriving at a movie late or entering a room in the middle of conversation. So lest you spend the next several minutes wondering what happened the day before, permit me to brief you:

John the Baptist is having a conversation with two of his disciples. When Jesus walks by, John points to him while saying to his followers, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two scurry after Jesus and when he sees them following he turns and asks them what they are looking for. They in turn ask him where he lives and Jesus says to them “Come and see.” We don’t know what happened while they were with Jesus, but they leave believing him to be the Jewish Messiah. One of those two disciples is Andrew who immediately goes and finds

his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus. That's what disciples do. Jesus takes one look at Simon, sees something only God can see, and re-names him Peter, the rock. We are now ready for the "next day".

"THE NEXT DAY JESUS DECIDED TO GO TO GALILEE."

Just before heading north, Jesus finds Philip and simply says, "Follow me." Without a word, without a question, Philip follows. Naturally we find this remarkable perhaps even unbelievable. Equally unbelievable is that John does not comment on Jesus' ability to command this blind obedience, even though it is as stunning as a man commanding the wind and waves. Perhaps John presents this blind trust and obedience as a sign pointing to Jesus' divinity.

Philip then runs to find his friend Nathanael, telling him that Jesus of Nazareth is the Coming One, the Promised One, the One who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. ***At this point we might be tempted to anoint Philip as the Patron Saint of the Credulous.*** Even John seems worried that we might believe Jesus only attracted the gullible and those

easily persuaded. Enter Nathanael the Cynical...perhaps as Phillip's counterweight.

"NAZARETH, DID YOU SAY HE WAS FROM NAZARETH?"

"Can *anything* good come out of Nazareth?" We are told later that Nathanael hails from Cana, which must have been Galilee's counterpart to Missouri, the "Show me" state. Philip simply repeats Jesus' words to Andrew, "Come and See". Although he is skeptical, Nathanael trusts his friend enough to go to Jesus.

JESUS SEES NATHANAEL COMING AND GREETES HIM,

"Behold a true Israelite, one in whom there is no guile." This is a curious greeting because Israelites were known for their guile. They took pride in being descendants of Jacob, the trickster who lived by his wits and was a master of fast-talk and slick business deals. Further, Nathanael seems to be

anything but guileless and naïve; there's more serpent than dove in this one. Had Jesus called Philip guileless we may have bought it. What could Jesus be driving at here? What did he mean by his greeting? The answer comes in the following interaction between Jesus and Nathanael.

NATHANAEL IS SHOCKED AT JESUS' REMARK.

"How do you know me?" he asks. Jesus responds by being mysterious, "Before Philip called you, when you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you." Now remember Philip had invited Nathanael to "Come and See" Jesus. Jesus seems to be saying that he knew Nathanael and in a sense was drawing him to himself before Philip ever acted. Further, Jesus is telling Nathanael that he and he alone knows the true Nathanael. Philip's friend bows down before Jesus proclaiming him Son of God, King of Israel. So stunning is this turnaround that even Jesus seems to be taken aback. He goes on to promise Nathanael that he will see greater things than this, that he will see Jesus as the touch point between heaven and earth, a moveable Temple where God himself dwells.

SO WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING HERE THESE TWO DAYS?

We have seen several people come to Jesus, four of whom later become disciples. They follow Jesus because they believe him to be the One for whom Israel has been waiting. They follow him because they have had a personal encounter with him and have formed a relationship of sorts with him. They follow him because friends invite them to “come and see” Jesus. It is clear that these stories are in some way about how various people came to believe in Jesus. But it is equally clear that the main focus is on the identity of Jesus and the significance of his presence.

EACH OF THE FOUR HAS SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT WHO JESUS IS.

And yet it is obvious to us who have heard the great prologue to this Gospel that all the titles given are inadequate or misleading.

- Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, but he is not the Messiah anyone expected.
- Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets but in ways no one could imagine.
- Jesus is the Savior of the world, but he will effect this salvation in a way that is scandalous to the Jews and foolish to the Gentiles.

This is all to say that even those willing to come and see Jesus, must also be willing to give up many of their preconceived notions. They must be willing to adjust their basic religious ideas. In fact, since Jesus is the supreme and final revelation of God on earth, those who follow him must be willing to change their very ideas about God Himself.

AND SO THIS STRANGE STORY CHALLENGES US THIS MORNING AS WELL.

It challenges us to give up our pre-conceived ideas about Jesus and our self-serving notions about God and what it means to follow him.

- It calls us to see in Jesus God's Son who uniquely reveals God's nature, God's will, and God's ways in the world.
- It calls us to come and see what God is doing in and through Jesus of Nazareth.
- It calls us to see the world as God sees it and to live in the world as God's demands we live.
- It calls us to pursue God's purposes in the world rather than our own.

John presented Nathanael as a true Jew, one who began with doubt about Jesus but was won over by Jesus' presence. There is a sense in which Nathanael is also presented as our model. Nathanael is no fool, he is skeptical and wise, but he is also open to God and God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. He is open to radical change. After all, Nathanael's first words are, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" and his final words are "You are the Son of God, the King of Israel."

Surprise of surprises, not only good but God can come out of Nazareth. Our God is indeed a God of surprises.

