

Come and See
Epiphany 2
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This sermon was originally preached at Grace Lutheran Church and School in River Forest, IL. using the gospel text for the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany: John 1:43-51

A note: During the sermon I said that the brick had a racial slur written on it...more accurately the slur was written on paper that was wrapped around the brick.

I cannot believe I never saw that before....How could I have missed it....it was right there and yet....somehow hidden from my view?

After learning that Jesus was from the backwoods town of Nazareth, one of those one stop light kind of places...one of those blink and you miss it kind of towns....A place that was not too much to write home about...

Nathaniel says to Phillip..."can anything good come out of Nazareth...." Basically saying as one writer did this week....."Nazareth isn't good enough for the divine...." God's chosen one, the messiah....he wouldn't be from Nazareth...would he?

Skeptical and without much expectation at all Nathaniel tells Phillip how he really feels about where this Jesus Character is from and Phillip says...Come and see....

A few verses later...Nathaniel...still maybe a little confused....asks Jesus....where did you come to know me....And..Jesus responds...I saw you under the fig tree...

And...with that realization....Nathaniel....all of the sudden....out of the blue says...Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!

Nathaniel has come along way in just a few short verses...from basically writing him off because of his hometown...to confessing that Jesus is the Son of God...and the King of Israel...the quick about face is almost enough to give someone whiplash....

As my preaching professor put it...."Something snapped into focus in this passage for Nathaniel that is not obvious to the hearer"

As Dr. Jan Rippentrop Schnell says, "There is something about that fig tree remark that made who Jesus is clear for Nathaniel. The reader does not get to be privy to what exactly transformed Nathaniel's view of Jesus."

She goes on to say that Nathaniel had an Epiphany...as she describes it...."An epiphany of God allowed something new to snap into focus for Nathaniel. That newness changed his life." An epiphany of God...allowed something new to snap into focus.....and that newness changed his life....

I cannot believe I never saw that before....How could I have missed it....it was right there and yet....somehow hidden from my view? That's what I felt like saying over and over again when I was in the class called Public Church 1 in seminary...especially as we read and discussed the book called Womanist Ethics and the cultural production of evil....authored by Dr. Emilie Townes...Dean of the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University....

The book is an in-depth study of cultural, history, ethics, and theology that weaves together how racism and white supremacy have become so intrinsic to life in the United States...it could be said it is the air we breathe...there is no way to escape it...

But, as a white person....it had been there my whole life....I just could not see it...until...I had an epiphany...in that class....reading that book..... And then I started to see it everywhere...

An epiphany allows us to see something clearly....that before, for whatever reason...was hidden from our view...

It happened to Nathaniel....and it happens to all of us....from time to time....

I cannot believe I never saw that before....How could I have missed it....it was right there and yet....somehow hidden from my view?

I wonder if that is what some folks said after they saw the news that a brick seems to have been thrown at the door of a black owned business in Oak Park.... On Oak Park Ave...With racial slurs written on paper and wrapped around the brick....

Maybe before this incident we couldn't see that racism exists in our neighborhoods too....of course our siblings of color though.... have always known that racism exists everywhere....even here...

But it takes epiphanies...sometimes....for us to see things clearly.....

It happened to Nathaniel and it happens to us.... After an epiphany we see things...as they are...our vision no longer clouded by whatever it is that make our line of sight blurry...or foggy....

Sometimes they happen in an instant....like for Nathaniel...sometimes they happen over time...

We are in the season of epiphany...in between Christmas and Lent...where we are invited to see Jesus revealed in all sorts of ways....to all sorts of people...in all sorts of places.... And then...seeing Jesus....we may see other things too... other things might be revealed to us... Seeing Jesus....revealed....other things may become clearer too...

Jesus has a way of doing that...one epiphany leads to another...and soon it a domino effect of sorts...and our line of sight becomes unobstructed and we see things as they are....

Jesus does that to people....God's epiphany come to flesh...has a way of opening up all sorts of vision for us...whose vision has been blurred by sin and life in this world....Without him...it's sometimes hard to see....with him we have fields of vision...open up before us in a vast landscape....

I cannot believe I never saw that before....How could I have missed it....it was right there and yet....somehow hidden from my view?

For Nathaniel it was Jesus himself he had missed....or at least miscalculated...because of the whole Nazareth thing...but then...his epiphany...had something to do with the fig tree...and Jesus finding him there...when he wasn't even looking...

The more we see Jesus....who has found us....sometimes when we were not looking either....under our own fig tree....the more we look at him....gazing at us... when we see him as who he is...the one from Nazareth...of all places....who leads us to all sorts of unexpected places.....to the margins with the forgotten ones of the world....all the way to a cross...on a hill...outside of the city....of all places....the one who goes to the very place of death with us...overturning our expectations and bringing life even from that....we see him also as the one who finds us...when we are lost...when we are wondering...when we need forgiveness...and salvation...when we need life from our death....when we are without hope...when we feel like we do not measure up..or have what it takes....when our faith is fleeting and we are under the tree of despair....its heavy leaves blocking our view....Jesus finds us...He has found us....and all the lost ones...Come and see...revealed in his word and in each other...we see him here....with us....come and see Jesus revealed...in a world of racism and white supremacy and he opens our eyes to his body revealed in both the people who have been under the cloud of oppression in large and small ways and their witness to the world as

it is....and in the voices of those working for justice....casting vision for the world as it should be....
and one epiphany leads to another.....

Jesus finds us and from there....Come and see....Jesus revealed....in the bodies of those who went to
Scoville park on Monday....to testify to an Oak Park where black voices and black business is not
threatened but celebrated...and one epiphany leads to another...

Jesus finds us and from there...come and see Jesus revealed....in the youth of Grace as they gathered
yesterday to get bags ready to go so they can be sent to homebound seniors...living out their
baptismal vocations....and one epiphany leads to another.....

Jesus finds us and from there....come and see Jesus revealed....in the social ministry committee of
Grace always equipping us for service....always reminding us that we are set free to love God by
serving all of our neighbors....And one epiphany leads to another.....

Jesus finds us and from there....come and see Jesus revealed....in Sunday School students....still
learning the faith....in pandemic....over zoom...thanks to the amazing leadership of Julie Modrich and
story telling of Gwen Gotsch...and through those Sunday School students...still gathered...with the
fullness of joy and apprehension....together on a screen....and one epiphany leads to another....

Jesus finds us and from there...come and see Jesus revealed in the moms of littles...hosting coffee
hour today....as they gather twice monthly to be present with each other...support each other... care
for one another...in the baptismal vocation of parenthood....and one epiphany leads to another...

Jesus finds us and from there...come and see Jesus revealed in a thousand different ways...in familiar
and not so familiar people and places...in mundane and magnificent manifestations....in the
predictable and in the paradoxical.....And one epiphany leads to another....

Jesus finds us...and from there come and see Jesus....revealed in your life....as you follow him in the
flow began at this font....in this uncertain and unsettling world...in your quiet and courageous
faithfulness...in your doubt and in your shaky and sometimes sure trust.... in your tears and in your
laughter....Jesus is there...he promises us...and with those eyes of faith...given to us as
gift...sometimes we see more clearly than others...

Even when we are skeptical and lack expectations....maybe especially then...like Nathaniel...we will
have an epiphany....that suddenly makes everything clearer.....or at least some things a little
clearer....

After all....come and see.... And you just might find that Jesus has found you again and again...and yet
again this day...in this moment...and he holds you in his wounded arms of love....and when we see
him there....one epiphany leads to another....and our field of vision is open before us....and Jesus is
there too...

No really...come and see....and follow him into God's future....