

11 January 2012
Epiphany Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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"The Jesus Way"

Text: John 1:43-51 (1 Samuel 3:1-20; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

That's a pretty bold claim, Philip is making there, saying, with those words, that the Messiah had come. Others had made that claim before and all were proven to be frauds, impostors. Had Philip now been duped? Or was there something to his words?

What clinched it for Nathanael, what didn't make sense in his mind and so made him the skeptic, was one little detail in Philip's claim: *Nazareth*. ***Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*** Philip scoffed. In his mind, surely, that is not how God works. Surely, if the Messiah had come, it would have been grander and greater, surely not from that dinky, little, out-in-the-middle-of-nowhere town. That is not fitting for God. That is not how a good God does good things.

You know Nathanael, or at least, you know people like him. To tell the truth, we are often like him. We think we know how God ought to work, how He ought to do things. A good God should work good things for us in good ways. And when things happen that we think are not good, that don't make sense to our minds, that aren't grander and greater, we become the skeptic. So, for example, take suffering. *Can anything good come out of suffering?* That's not how a good God ought to do good things for me. Or what about trials, or the crosses God lays upon us in this life? *Can anything good come out of them?*

But neither Nazareth nor suffering nor trials nor crosses nor anything else in all creation is a barrier for God working good for you. What needs to be done is to put to death our wrong way of thinking, to repent of our arrogance in thinking that we know more than God and know how God ought to act. That's not easy. That wrong way of thinking has roots that go all the way back to Eve. But we are dealing with the living God here. The God who created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The God who has become man for us, yes, in Nazareth. He does not do things quite as we expect, or even as we want, but this is His way - the stable way, the Nazareth way, the cross way.

That's what we heard in the Old Testament reading tonight, with Eli and Samuel.

The Word of the Lord was rare in those days, we were told, so when God broke His silence, would it really be to a boy who didn't even really know Him yet? It took Eli a while to get it, but in the end, after hearing what the Lord said to Samuel, he says, ***"It is the LORD. Let him do what seems good to him."*** For what the Lord deems good is good.

So, ***come and see***, Philip says. So what did Nathanael see? Well, a man from Nazareth. No halo, no glow, a man that looked like every other man from Nazareth. But when Jesus spoke, then Nathanael started to see what he was unable to see before. Jesus knows that this is not how men think God ought to be or act, and so He *reveals* Himself to Nathanael. As the God who knows all things and so knows Nathanael. As the God who see all things, and so saw Nathanael before Nathanael saw Him. Then Nathanael is *epiphanied*. He believes and confesses, ***"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"*** And now Nathanael is the one saying the big words.

But does Nathanael really know Jesus? He may confess who Jesus is, the God-man, but it must still be revealed to him what Jesus will do. ***"You will see greater things than these,"*** Jesus says to him. Though they at first will not seem greater. The Jesus who knows all things seems great. The Jesus who sees all things seems great. But the Jesus who is despised and rejected and mocked and scorned and hung up on a cross to die? *Can anything good come out of the cross?*

We now know the answer to that is yes, though we are not always convinced that good can come out of the crosses God lays on us. But this is the great work of God for you. Jesus won't be another kind of God just to fit our desires. He won't be what our dinky, little minds think He should be. To make us happy for a moment or two or even a lifetime isn't enough - but an eternity, that's what Jesus has in mind. An eternity in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness with Him. Sins forgiven. Heaven opened. Glory. Angels.

And so our sin of trying to make Jesus into another kind of God is put to death on the cross, along with all our other sins. That's what the Son of God has come to do for us. So that, as St. Paul said, we not be ***enslaved by anything*** in this world anymore. ***For you were bought with a price*** - the life and blood of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the King of Israel. And now from this good and glorious sacrifice flows sins forgiven, heaven opened, glory, angels. Great things. For you.

And with that comes the answer to the question we perhaps should have been asking all along. Not: *can anything good come out of Nazareth?* but: *can anything good come out of me?* Jesus says yes! For you He sees and knows. For you He died and rose. And He has raised you to new life in Him and put His name upon you and His Spirit in you in Holy Baptism. And as He lives in you and you in Him, what

comes out of you is Jesus. Jesus' name, Jesus' life, Jesus' love, Jesus' forgiveness.

That's a pretty bold claim, coming from sinners. But that's the Nazareth way, the cross way, the Jesus way.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.