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John 1:43-51

“Come and See”

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." **44** Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. **45** Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." **46** "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. **47** When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." **48** "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." **49** Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." **50** Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." **51** He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The life of faith is often more messy than we would care to admit. We talk about faith as if we were all giants who could weather any kind of trial. Did you hear about the Elderly woman who was known for her faith? She would stand on her front porch and shout "Praise the Lord!" Next door to her lived an atheist who would get so angry at her proclamations he would shout, "There is no God!" Hard times set in on the lady, and she prayed for God to send her some assistance. She stood on her porch and shouted "Praise the Lord. God I need food! Please send me some groceries!" The next morning the lady went out on her porch and noted a large bag of groceries and shouted, "Praise the Lord." The neighbor jumped from behind a bush and said, "Aha! I told you there was no Lord. I bought those groceries, God didn't." The lady started jumping up and down and clapping her hands and said, "Praise the Lord. He not only sent me groceries, but He made the devil pay for them. Praise the Lord!"

We would like to have such faith, but we don't. C.S. Lewis once said, "I think the trouble with me is lack of faith. I have no rational ground for going back on the arguments that convinced me of God's existence: but the irrational deadweight of my old nature remains... Mind you I don't think so – the whole of my reasonable mind is convinced [of Christianity]: but I often feel so" (Alister McGrath, *Doubting*, p. 9).

In our reading from John, we witness the call of Nathanael. This is a very honest picture of how faith works. First, we find Nathanael lying under a fig tree. He is not looking for Jesus. But Jesus is looking for him. Philip, a new disciple of Jesus, goes and calls his friend Nathaniel to follow Jesus. Verse 45: "Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip" (John 1:45-46).

That is usually how evangelism works. It is not some program or even some committee. Rather, it is a friend inviting another friend to "Come and see."

Does Nathanael have any idea what he was getting into? No. Did you have any idea what you were getting into when Jesus called you? No. The life of faith always has humble beginnings: a simple invitation or a splash of water. The Kingdom of God is a tiny mustard seed.

Soon the little seed grows into a mighty plant. What began with curiosity becomes a deep faith. Nathanael encounters Jesus and goes from wondering if anything good can come out of Nazareth (1:46) to proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel (1:49).

What happened? The simple answer: Jesus happened! Verse 47: "When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." (1:47-49).

These are strange words to us, but understandable to Nathaniel. These words are an allusion to Zechariah 3:10, "In that day, says the Lord of hosts, a man will call his neighbor under a vine and under a fig tree." According to Zechariah 3, the act of one man calling another under a vine and fig tree was to mark the arrival of the Messiah (3:8). That is why Nathanael responds by calling Jesus the Messiah: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (John 1:49).

Again, this might seem strange that such words could a man to follow. Remember, Jesus is speaking. Jesus can tell a blind man to see and immediately the man sees. The Word of God has power.

Many years ago in a Moscow theater, Alexander Rostovzev (Ro-stov-zev) was converted while playing the role of Jesus in a sacrilegious play entitled Christ in a Tuxedo. He was supposed to read two verses from the Sermon on the Mount, remove his gown, and cry out, "Give me my tuxedo and top hat!" But as he read the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," he began to tremble. Instead of following the script, he kept reading from Matthew 5, ignoring the coughs, calls, and foot-stamping of his fellow actors. Finally, recalling a verse he had learned in his childhood in a Russian Orthodox church, he cried, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!" (J.K. Johnston, [Why Christians Sin](#), Discovery House, 1992, p. 121).

The Word of God is powerful. Jesus spoke and Nathanael's eyes were opened. He saw Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel.

Jesus is not done with Nathanael. Jesus wants Nathanael (and us) to see more. Verse 51, "I tell you (pl) the truth, you (pl) shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." These are perplexing words. How could Jesus open heaven? How could he be a ladder? These words are promise words. Jesus is saying that he is "Jacob's Ladder." Jesus is the one who opens heaven to us. Jesus is the door for the sheep. Jesus is the vine whose branches bear fruit. Jesus is the way to the father. These words do not make sense without the cross. It is when Jesus is on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth, that these words came true. Heaven is open.

That is the promise for us today. Our lives are messy. We are not giants in the faith. Our faith moves from weak to strong and back to weak again. Jesus knows this. Jesus gives us a promise to hold onto in such times. The promise is that even right now, heaven is open to you.

The world we live in is difficult. The devil attacks us at every turn. The good news is that we are citizen of heaven. When life gets too overwhelming, simply look up and see that Heaven is open to you. Or when you sin and fall short of the glory of God. Heaven is still open to you. Even as we worship, heaven is open to you. As we sing, heaven sings with us.

Do you see these things? Not fully! You catch glimpses. In the meal, you get a foretaste of the feast to come. In the absolution, you hear of the complete forgiveness Christ has won. When you are with other Christians you experience a taste of the consolation of believers. Now you see in part. Soon you will see in full.

Until that time, Jesus simple calls us to "Come and see!"

**In Jesus Name,
Amen**