

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany January 14, 2024

John 1:43-51

Themes for the season and today: Epiphany literally means “to shine upon” and we regard the season as one in which we reflect on the many ways God self-reveals to humanity. John’s Gospel presents Jesus who invites us to experience him and God directly.

43The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” 46Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” 47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” 48Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” 49Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 50Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” 51And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

SERMON

John just might exceed the Dick and Jane primer books with the repeated use of the words “look” and “see”. John’s being cagey and not repetitive. He leads us into encounters with God where seeing might be believing; or in believing and trusting we see new things and see other things in new ways. John’s love for double meanings opens us to the possibility that we see with our hearts and minds as much as we see with our eyes.

Maybe people hearing John's Gospel nearly two generations after Jesus' earthly life took heart when they heard that some would trust Jesus and follow him even though they hadn't clapped eyes on the earthly Jesus.

What Jesus says to Nathaniel is meant for some of those same people. The promise Jesus makes to Nathaniel shifts from a dialogue to broader announcement to us who overhear Jesus say... "You all will see greater things than these".

The very next thing John recounts is Jesus turning water into wine. That's pretty impressive. Yet Jesus says what Nathaniel and the rest of us will see is bigger than that.

Maybe Nathaniel recalled his own experience with Jesus when he and the other disciples witness Jesus meeting a woman in Samaria— Jesus truly sees her and not just what people think they know about her. She invites all who will listen to come and see this one who sees and who knows and who embodies truth that God's love is for everyone.

Even after the encounter in Samaria, even after the wine graced wedding, Nathaniel hasn't seen everything yet. Nor have we. Nathaniel's seen plenty...just not everything not those greater things Jesus says he and the rest of us will see.

Three days after Jesus is executed, Mary Magdalene approaches an empty tomb and she reports the most remarkable sighting of all... "I have seen the Lord!", she says. She has glimpsed light and love that cannot be extinguished and she has seen the greatest thing—Not even death separates us from the Love of God shining through the person of Jesus, the risen Christ and the one Nathaniel in days gone by called "Son of God".

Still Jesus invites us to come and see...and the church is assigned the role of inviting others to come and see the Goodness of God, whose intention is to bless and save the world.