

## Hudson Church Epistle

### Thursday, January 14, 2021

Hello Church!

Here we are in these challenging days, a constitutional crisis for our government in a time of a global pandemic. But we have options about how we choose to respond and to react. Since the afternoon of January 6<sup>th</sup>, I have been blessed to attend five regularly scheduled meetings and one called meeting where we have all been thinking about and talking over how to respond and to react to our current events. The two options that keep bubbling up among people I respect are to keep praying and to keep listening. That is to listen deeply for the voice of God while listening carefully to my fellow humans.

That is hard to do in a world that seems to be demanding that we react with journalists and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle overusing the word “crisis.” One thing that strikes me this past year as COVID-19 gave me motivation and time to dive deep into Paul’s writings is a realization that we would not have the New Testament if it were not for the chaos happening politically in the first century, stretching from John’s and Jesus’ births through to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. I believe just as God was at work in the world then, God is at work in the world now.

As a lifetime Bible reader, an awareness that the New Testament was composed in a span of less than a single century helps me realize that the crisis of the day is not the only crisis humanity has ever faced. It also helps me realize that God is always at work for our good in times of crisis. After all, it was not the decision of a single afternoon that led to the destruction of the Temple, it was the culmination of decades of Roman occupation of Israel, the overarching current event at the time the New Testament was written.

Therefore, as a depth student of the Bible, when I hear the word “crisis” six times in two minutes or when I see the same picture on almost every news broadcast, I assume we may not be seeing everything in the panic of the moment. I assume that in the chaos God is at work for our good. I join Fred Rogers and “look for the helpers.”

But you say, what does this have to do with the homework from Monday’s epistle? Nothing and everything, because as I took on my commitment to research Nathanael using ordinary internet resources, I discovered a man who lived in first century Palestine, who knew Jesus, and who like me loved to read the word of God, although he only had the Old Testament when we first find him in Jesus’ story in John 1:43-51.

Nathanael was introduced to Jesus by Philip. Nathanael had a healthy skepticism, an attitude to information that we can imitate. On hearing a jubilant friend proclaim he has found the Christ, Nathanael replied, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) The Gospel writers were strongly inspired by the Spirit in so many ways, including embedding models of behavior in

difficult times, here Nathanael respectfully questioning Philip's information. Suddenly I wish John had given me more than a few sentences. A five-second video clip would be helpful.

Jesus then arrived and recognized Nathanael as a faithful Jewish man. How Nathanael was groomed and dressed would be signals of his identity to Jesus. Jesus may have overheard the question meant for Philip, healthy skepticism was and is an important part of the synagogue movement Jesus as a rabbi was part of. What fascinates me about Nathanael as a model for faithful living this week is that Nathanael was easily recognized as a faithful person, his testimony was not covert but plainly visible.

In Wikipedia, I found some new to me information that Nathanael is also assumed by some scholars to be Bartholomew in the other three Gospels and Acts that I followed up on some Bible study sites of different denominations. Common to every sited, in the first three Gospels and Acts, in the lists of disciples, Bartholomew always follows Philip. Only in John is the name Nathanael and not Bartholomew. Second, Bartholomew is a Jewish family name meaning the son of a farmer ("bar- "in Jewish names always mean "son of"). If true this would mean that Nathanael was an active church planter in the first years of the Christian church. While that idea is appealing, honoring Nathanael means holding a healthy skepticism before going too far to make it a firm fact.

Still, studying Nathanael inspires me as I think about my role in the crisis of our time. Nathanael's healthy skepticism is a wise behavior that anyone, even as Nathanael did with breaking news one hopes to hear. It is interesting that Nathanael used his healthy skepticism with his close friend Philip. While we do not know the word that defined their relationship, we do know that they were more than casual acquaintances. This idea of talking over news with trusted people is something both Philip and Nathanael did as the word of Christ arriving was first spreading.

So, there you have it a dive into all we know of a single disciple leads to a behavior we can apply in our living today. So today, keep praying, keep listening, and boldly question the news you hear. After all, Jesus honored Nathanael for doing just that, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no dishonesty." (John 1:47)

May grace abound as the Lord sees us through these times of many crises.

Blessings!

Rev. Dawn