

Title: There Is Something Good!

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, when we divide ourselves into teams, let us always be reminded that other team is no less worthy than our team and our team or whatever side we choose to be on is on the side of love and peace and opposed to hate and violence, we pray through the one who is the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Joel D. Kline wrote, “Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke with some frequency during his years of ministry of putting on the ‘weapon of love.’ Responding to those who resisted the emerging civil rights movement, King asserted, ‘We will counter your force with soul force, we will match your ability to hate with our ability to love.’”

“And King reminded us that at the heart of Jesus’ life and message is the call to be peacemakers and reconcilers. Violence, said King again and again, ‘never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problems; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.’”

“We live in a world thirsty for this gospel of peace. With Martin Luther King, and with Jesus before him, we need to announce with integrity, ‘The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind. It is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than on love. It destroys community...Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.’”

This is the story of human history. I think, in some ways, violence becomes a choice because we are lazy. Reconciliation is hard work. Violence seeks a quick solution, which it never is.

When Jesus brings his message of love, Jesus is not breaking new ground. The seed is in Eden. The hope is in calling Abraham and Sarah into a new relationship to show the world what can be. Abraham and Sarah were a long time ago. The world is still waiting to grow up.

After the Jews decided to look inward rather than outward to the world, God became incarnate so that God’s message of love might reach people beyond

the Levant. That is the world that Jesus entered. Jesus never left the Levant, but his followers did. So, it was very important for Jesus to pick the right followers.

In John's gospel, Jesus lingers in the area where John the Baptist was baptizing. Andrew was a follower or disciple of John the Baptist and decided to follow Jesus. Andrew then brought his brother, Simon, to Jesus where Jesus renamed him Cephas or Peter. Cephas means, the Rock, not to be confused with Dwayne Johnson.

After that, Jesus decides to return to Galilee. We are told that Jesus found Philip. It seems like Jesus was looking for Philip. This wasn't a case of Jesus just happening to run into him. Instead, Jesus sought him out. We don't know if Jesus knew Philip previously. Jesus told Philip, "Follow me," and Philip did. We are told that Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter, so perhaps, Andrew and/or Peter had campaigned for Philip's inclusion on Jesus' team.

Philip is quickly immersed into who and what Jesus is. Philip is excited about this movement. Philip is so excited, he finds his friend Nathanael. The way it is written is that Philip describes Jesus as the one written about in Moses, meaning the Law, and the prophets. In other words, the messiah. Then Philip names him, Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth.

Nathanael was not impressed. Nazareth? Really? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip made no attempt to argue with Nathanael. Instead, he said, "Come and see." That is a pretty simple response. Pretty, pretty simple. That is the basic way Anglicans do evangelism. It is hard to explain Anglicanism and Anglican worship. Robin Williams kept it simple by saying, we are "Catholic lite." Beyond the creeds and the first ecumenical councils, Anglicans have little in the way of dogma.

The way to know what we believe is to see how we worship. And so we say, "Come and see." The Eucharistic liturgy is more than some words. Our liturgies liberally quote scripture. Our liturgies also express our theology. "Come and see."

Either out of curiosity or respect for Philip, Nathanael went to meet Jesus. Maybe he wondered if anything good really can come from Nazareth. Nazareth must have had a really bad reputation back then.

When Jesus sees Nathanael approaching, Jesus calls him an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. This is a loaded statement. The patriarch, Jacob, is known as the father of the Israelites. God named Jacob, Israel. Jacob was a conniver. Jacob was deceitful. So, Israel as a person and Israel as a nation became synonymous with deceit. Jesus doesn't say, "Here is a Jew without deceit." Jesus says, "Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." In other words, Nathanael is an atypical Israelite.

Nathanael agrees with Jesus' description of him. In fact, Nathanael is surprised and asks Jesus how Jesus knows him. Nathanael was thinking, "How can a stranger know me?"

Jesus says that the reason Jesus knows Nathanael is because Jesus saw him under a fig tree before Philip called him. Upon reading this passage again, it struck me that a fig tree might mean more than a fig tree, or at least, have a significance that is not readily apparent.

In Genesis, there only three trees mentioned in Eden. One of those is a fig tree. It was one of two that was okay to eat from. The prophets used the fig tree to symbolize Israel. If the tree is healthy, Israel is healthy. If tree is not healthy, Israel is not healthy. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus curses the fig tree. The plant is a symbol of prosperity, wellbeing, and security in the Bible. The fig tree yields fruit at the times of the biggest Jewish holidays.

For Nathanael, an Israelite, to be seen under a fig tree might mean that the Israelite benefits from a close association with the fig tree, Israel. It might also mean that an Israelite without deceit wants to reform a deceitful Israel. Such a person would be a very willing disciple to one who is challenging the religious authorities. Andrew was also likely a rebel, which is why he was following John the Baptist who challenged the Jerusalem authorities as Jesus will soon do.

Jesus' insight with the fig tree was enough for Nathanael. Something good can indeed come from Nazareth. Nathanael gives Jesus three titles, the first being Rabbi. To call someone a Rabbi, which means teacher, means that

Nathanael has signed on as a disciple, or a student. The last two titles, Son of God and King of Israel, are synonymous with the messiah.

If Nathanael was impressed with Jesus seeing him under a fig tree, well, he ain't seen nothing yet. There are even greater things coming. Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see the heavens opened and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, another messianic title.

This is another reference to Jacob. After Jacob left home, fleeing for his life because he stole his brother's blessing, Jacob stopped to rest and sleep. As Jacob slept, he had a dream seeing angels ascending and descending near where he laid. God spoke and God reaffirmed the covenant God made with Abraham that Jacob's or Israel's descendants would be numerous and the world will be blessed through them. Jacob placed a rock there as a pillar and named the place Bethel, which means House of God.

What Jesus is saying that instead of a rock, Jesus is the House of God. (Remember it is Peter who is the Rock.) Jesus is the gateway to heaven and Jesus is where God dwells. Jesus' followers fulfill the covenant God made with Abraham.

Nathanael had a prejudice against anything or anyone coming from Nazareth. After meeting Jesus, Nathanael declares the one from Nazareth the messiah. That's a big leap. It was an epiphany. It is my observation that this is a way to break prejudice. Once one who is of or from a particular group that we might stereotype is met and known to us, our attitudes shift.

Prejudice is an attitude. Kids are not naturally prejudiced. It is usually taught. Or it can be attitudes or opinions we form from observation. We see a person in a bad light and paint all people like that person in the same way. In terms of formal logic, this method is a fallacy.

Tomorrow we observe the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. We celebrate his life because of his work to break down racism in this country. It was thought that our country entered a post-racism age with the election of Barak Obama. Instead, it hardened racists and racist organizations in this country. Those forces are now unleashed.

The antidote to prejudice and racism is love. We promised or it was promised for us at our baptisms that we will love our neighbors as ourselves and we will strive for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being. That is our Christian mission.

Can anything good come out of Georgia? Yes, it can.

Text: **John 1:43–51** (NRSV)

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

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

^m Both instances of the Greek word for *you* in this verse are plural#

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Jn 1:43–51). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.