

Something good can come out of Nazareth
John 1:43-51

Second Sunday after Epiphany
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“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” This is a conversation stopper even if you don’t have the context. And speaking of the context, this is what Nathaniel says to Philip in our gospel reading when Phillip shows up very excited to say that he has found the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote - Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathaniel is not convinced. The one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote? The Messiah? From Nazareth? You’ve got to be kidding me. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

What’s amazing is that the conversation doesn’t end there. Phillip says – come and see! And Nathaniel does. And from there Nathaniel goes from completely dismissing Jesus to calling him Son of God and the King of Israel. How does this happen? Why did Nathaniel go with Phillip when he had such a negative response? Was it because of their friendship? I know I would follow a good friend even if I was skeptical. Did it have something to do with the excitement Phillip must have had? Excitement is contagious. And then the most amazing moment of all – encountering Jesus - which produces this incredible turn around. When Jesus sees Nathaniel, he declares that he is a man without deceit. This must have rung true for Nathaniel and he realizes that Jesus knows him and he asks Jesus how do you know me? Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you. And Nathaniel declares Jesus the Son of God.

For me the tenor of the question – can anything good come out of Nazareth? – applies to how many of us have been feeling. After the attack on the Capitol last week, I think we all were hoping for a coming together, a sign that our country is not going to continue to descend into violence and that the political parties would find ways to work to start bringing this country together. As I listened to the news this week, I didn’t see that happening. I have found myself sad because I wanted a sign of hope from our leaders. Last Thursday as I was driving to the gym early in the morning pondering and praying as I do, it came to me that I was looking for hope in the wrong place. It was as if God was saying to me - were you really placing your hope in the politicians? You know where your hope is. And indeed I do. My hope is in God, in Jesus. It is in Jesus that I will find my transformation – my turn around.

It is natural isn’t it to look to our leaders for hope- whether it is our government, our teachers and maybe even to your priest as they preach and teach. And at times I have heard hope from all these sources, but I am reminded where our true hope is and perhaps this is what Nathaniel discovered that day. He like all the other Jews at the time was waiting for the Messiah – a [king](#) from the [Davidic line](#), who is expected to save the Jewish nation, and rule the Jewish people during the [Messianic Age](#). This king will [gather the Jews](#) back into the [Land of Israel](#), usher in a new day. In Nathaniel’s opinion, this position was not going to be filled by anyone from Nazareth. And yet as a result of Phillip’s enthusiastic invitation, Nathaniel discovers the King of the Jews, the Son of God in Jesus. Does he understand that Jesus is not the political king he is longing for? Probably not, but he has encountered the one who teaches a different way – a way of love, peace, kindness, forgiveness, service and justice. This one – Jesus – is still our hope today and the world is in desperate need of this hope.

How can we connect with this hope? How can we spread this hope especially when so many are in that place where we just want to mutter – Can anything good come out of _____? I'll let you fill in the blank.

For me the first step is making sure we are connected to / immersed in the hope of Jesus Christ. The challenges we face can leave us weary and searching for hope in wrong places. How can we discover your hope? Be faithful in your prayer – not just in asking, but in listening – listening in silence, listening as you take a walk and in listening to scripture. Also look for the Phillips in your life - the ones that call you to hope. Look to the words of those who came before us and proclaimed that hope.

On this Martin Luther King Day weekend, think about the dream Dr. King proclaimed. “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” Think of how these words have lived on and continue to proclaim that hope today. Those words changed this country to create equal rights for African Americans and for all people. And while that much of that work still needs to be done, that dream that Dr. King set forth remains a beacon of hope. Do you hear in what that dream is rooted in? It is rooted in the glory of the Lord being revealed.

“The former South African archbishop Desmond Tutu used to famously say, “We are prisoners of hope.” This was very evident when the South African Security Police broke into the Cathedral of St. George’s during his sermon at an ecumenical service. Desmond Tutu stopped preaching and just looked at the intruders as they lined the walls of his cathedral, wielding writing pads and tape recorders to record whatever he said and thereby threatening him with consequences for any bold prophetic utterances. After meeting their eyes with his in a steely gaze, the church leader acknowledged their power (“You are powerful, very powerful”) but reminded them that he served a higher power greater than their political authority (“But I serve a God who cannot be mocked!”). Then, in the most extraordinary challenge to political tyranny, Archbishop Desmond Tutu told the representatives of South African apartheid, “Since you have already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side!” He said it with a smile on his face and enticing warmth in his invitation, but with a clarity and a boldness that took everyone’s breath away. The congregation’s response was electric. The crowd was literally transformed by the bishop’s challenge to power. From a cowering fear of the heavily armed security forces that surrounded the cathedral and greatly outnumbered the band of worshipers left to their feet, shouted the praises of God and began...dancing.¹

Talk about proclamation of hope in the midst of despair! This is the hope we must be intentional in nurturing within ourselves because the world will try and wipe it out. And when you find yourself with that hope of Jesus Christ bubbling over in your heart, go out and proclaim it. When you encounter that despair and frustration found in “What good can come out of _____?” - again you fill in the blank, share your source of hope, your experience of Jesus breaking in and reminding you of the most powerful hope in the world – that God loves us, is always with us and

¹ — Jim Wallis, God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It

teaches us a different way - – a way of love, peace, kindness, forgiveness, service and justice.
As Phillip did, be ready to say – come and see! Come and see what God can do.