

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – The Second Sunday after the Epiphany – John 1:43-51 – January 14th, 2018

We are in the season of the church year called Epiphany. Last week, we learned that epiphany means “to reveal.” In Epiphany, God in his word reveals to us who Jesus is. As you come to church during Epiphany one of the questions you can ask yourself is, “What is God going to reveal to me this week about who Jesus is?” Today I want to focus on two things that God reveals about Jesus. First, Jesus knows us. Second, Jesus is the gateway and the staircase to heaven.

The first thing God reveals today about Jesus is that Jesus knows us. Our Gospel starts out. **The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 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.” (John 1:43-45)** The way that the Christian church originally grew and the main way it still grows today is by word of mouth. I’m sure you’ve heard someone talk about their business before and they say, “Well, we haven’t even done much advertising. We just grow through word of mouth.” Well, word of mouth is the main way that the church grows. One friend tells another friend about Jesus. One friend brings another friend to church to hear about Jesus. The main way the message is spread is through word of mouth. That’s what happened here in our Gospel. Philip found his friend Nathanael and told him, “We have found the Messiah, the promised Savior. His name is Jesus of Nazareth.”

Now Nathanael at first was not convinced. Nazareth wasn’t an important city and so Nathanael thought, “The Messiah can’t possibly come from there.” But then Philip tells him, “Just come and see. Just come and meet Jesus.” So Nathanael goes to meet Jesus. **“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.’” (1:47)** Jesus is saying, “This man is a very honest man.” Jesus is talking about Nathanael as if he knows Nathanael. But Jesus and Nathanael have never met. How can Jesus know Nathanael if they’ve never met? That’s the question Nathanael asks: **“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” (John 1:48)** No one had told Jesus that Nathanael was under the fig tree. This was supernatural knowledge. Nathanael is amazed at this and the Holy Spirit gives him the insight, “Jesus knows this because he’s the Son of God.” Nathanael says, **Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God” (John 1:49).**

This might seem like a pretty big leap for Nathanael to make. Just a few minutes ago Nathanael was saying, “How can anything good come out of Nazareth?” and now he’s saying, “You are the Son of God.” How can Nathanael make this big of a leap? Keep in mind two things: First, the Holy Spirit revealed this to him. And also, Nathanael realizes: Here is someone who knows my heart. Jesus said, **“Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” (1:47)** He knows what’s in my heart. The only one who can know what’s in my heart is God. Remember the Bible passage, **“Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.”** Jesus can look into Nathanael’s heart and so he must be God. Also, Jesus knows Nathanael’s movements. The only person who can know a person’s movements and whereabouts is God. Nathanael doesn’t have a GPS tracker on his cell phone. The only way that Jesus can know Nathanael’s whereabouts at a given moment is if Jesus is God. Jesus says, “I *saw* you when you were sitting under the fig tree.” In the book of Proverbs it says that **“The eyes of the Lord are in every place” (Proverbs 15:3).** If Jesus saw Nathanael while he was sitting under the fig tree, then his eyes are in every place and so he must be the Son of God the second person of the Trinity.

And since Jesus is God, he not only knows Nathanael, he also knows you. Now that might be a little scary at first because if he knows everything about you, then he also knows your sins. But consider this, sometimes people say, “If you really knew me, you wouldn’t love me. If you knew the sinful things that I’ve done and if

you knew the deceit that's in my heart, you wouldn't love me." But here is someone who knows all of it and still loves you. He doesn't condone your sins but he died for your sins to take them all away.

Another thing to notice here is that Jesus knows Nathanael as an individual. There's 9 billion people in the world right now. But for Jesus, you don't get lost in the huge mass of humanity. Just like he saw Nathanael under the fig tree, he sees you when you're sitting at your kitchen table and he knows the things that are weighing on your heart and mind when you're sitting there.

A lot of people wonder. Is there anyone who knows me or cares about me. And the Epiphany gospel says "Yes. Jesus knit you together in your mother's womb. He knows the concerns that are on your heart and he knows just how to fix them." So the first thing that God reveals to us about Jesus today is that he knows us.

The second thing that God reveals to us about Jesus today is that he is the gateway and the staircase to heaven. Jesus says to Nathanael, **"You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'" (John 1:50-51).** What does that mean? You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. What does that mean? Well Jesus is quoting a part of the Old Testament. In Genesis 28 Jacob had a dream. It says in Genesis 28: **"When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."** So in his dream Jacob saw a staircase that connected heaven and earth and angels were ascending and descending, they were going up and down on that staircase. Well, when Jesus says, **"you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man"** when Jesus says that what he's saying is, "I'm the staircase that connects heaven and earth. I'm the way to get to heaven."

You see because of our sins, the door to heaven was a closed door to us. But Jesus says, "You will see heaven opened." By dying for our sins on the cross Jesus opened the door to heaven for us. And the way to get to heaven is through faith in him. Jesus said later in John's Gospel, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Sometimes people use the analogy that there is a big canyon between earth and heaven. And if you try to get to heaven by your good works it's like trying to jump across that canyon. What we need is something to bridge that canyon. Well, Jesus bridges that canyon so that we can get to heaven. At Epiphany God reveals to us that Jesus is the gateway and the staircase to heaven.

Nathanael started off the lesson thinking that Jesus was just an ordinary man from an ordinary town. But God revealed to Nathanael that Jesus is so much more than that. And in his word God reveals to us who Jesus is. He's the Son of God who knows us. He knit us together in our mother's womb. And he's also our gateway and our staircase to heaven. We would have been shut out of heaven. But Jesus has opened up the way through his blood. Thank God that he has revealed that to us. Amen.