

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
2nd Sunday after the Epiphany
15 January 2012
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Church, Wichita
John 1:43-52

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Nathanael was a good, pious, devout Israelite.

Jesus even says,

“...**an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!**” (Jn 1:47)

And being a good and faithful Israelite,

Nathanael was spending the morning under his fig tree, reading his Scriptures—
something like morning devotions.

He was good about this reading—

he kept at it, large portions at a time—
the Scriptures were a part of his daily routine.

But there was something wrong with Nathanael and his Bible reading.

He missed the point.

Sure, he knew the story...

He knew of God speaking creation into existence...

He knew of the flood and the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...

He knew of the Exodus, the wandering in the desert,
and Joshua leading his forefathers into the Promised Land...

He knew of the Judges and the Prophets and the Kings,
the tabernacle and temple and the exile...

He knew it all...

But he missed the point.

For Nathanael, the Bible, or *Torah* as he would've called it,

was a book of instruction, of morals and ethics—

it was God's way of saying:

“Do this and don't do that.”

For Nathanael, the Bible was a tool, or an instrument, that if used properly,
you could really please God.

You could live a good life,

You could be blessed and honored.

You could be happy and healthy and free from burden.

For Nathanael, it was all about bigger and better and greater and holier—
up and up and up!

And so it was that Nathanael missed the point.

How often we do the same.

We know we really ought to read our Bibles.

We feel guilty about not doing it, but have little motivation to actually start.
We know that somehow the answers to our questions can be found there,
but we haven't a clue about where to look or how to make sense of it all.

And when we really do start reading,
if we're able to keep a schedule, like Nathanael,
how often do we pat ourselves on the back, as if our reading was our gift to God?

We, too, miss the point.

We think of the Bible as a list of do's and don'ts, as instructions or a manual for proper living.
While these laws can certainly be found—
while you can find a God who lists how you should live and what to steer clear of—
that's not the point.

Nathanael finds all this out when his reading is rudely interrupted by St. Philip.

We don't know much about this Philip, except that when **“Jesus decided to go to Galilee, He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’”** (Jn 1:43).

And interestingly, the very next verse has seemingly nothing to do with *following* Jesus—
Philip runs ahead!

He's so full of joy, so full of whatever this Jesus has invited him into,
that he runs ahead and finds Nathanael—
that good and faithful Israelite, sitting under his fig tree reading his Bible.

And hardly able to contain himself, Philip blurts out,
“We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!” (Jn 1:45)

Don't worry about the fact that Philip got the order all wrong—
it wasn't him who found Jesus, but even as John says in this Gospel,
“Jesus found Philip” (Jn 1:43).

Philip wasn't speaking from a carefully worded document,
it was his heart overflowing with pure joy—it was like he said,
“Nathanael, the Bible you're reading is all about this Jesus!—Come and see!”

But Nathanael has read carefully.
He knows that there's a Messiah to come.
But Nazareth?—**“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** (Jn 1:46)

Again, Nathanael wants big and better—
for him it's all about up and up and up.

“Nazareth is a nobody town.

And if the Messiah were truly here, don’t you think I’d have heard about it?”

But again, Philip is full of joy, he won’t be distracted by Nathanael’s rejection, “**Come and see.**”

And while Nathanael was on his way,

trying to keep up with Philip while he was probably pulling his arm in excitement.

And there was Jesus.

He probably didn’t look like much—

no king’s vestments, no horse, no throne, no army, no gold—

nothing for Nathanael to recognize Him as the Christ.

But nevertheless, Jesus recognized Nathanael.

So Nathanael asks, “**How do you know me?**” (1:48)

“**Before Philip called you,**” Jesus said, “**when you were under the fig tree, I saw you**” (1:48).

And then it clicked; *Epiphany* for Nathanael!

While he was sitting under the fig tree, reading His *Torah*,

it was in fact that *Torah* (the Word made flesh) who was reading him!

And so Nathanael rightly calls Jesus a bunch of names the Torah gives him to call on this God:

“**Rabbi**,” which means teacher,

“**Son of God**,” which recognizes Jesus as the fulfillment of Adam, the prophets, and the rightful heir of heaven itself;

and finally “**King of Israel**,” which sees this Jesus as the true David, the one greater than Solomon, the Shepherd of this people, and savior.

For Nathanael, now on meeting this Jesus, all of Scripture was opened to him.

Now it was a delight, pure joy;

no longer a list of how to be a good anything.

Now it was a story not for him to try to imitate, about how to get to God;

but a story of God coming down for him!

Nathanael was now free!

His eyes were opened, and the Bible for Him was God’s word of love and gift to Him.

And so it is for you.

The Bible isn’t an instruction manual; it’s not a check list, or a dreadful thing you’ve got to do—

it’s the very Word of God Himself,

the story of what God goes out of His way to do all for you!

No longer is it about bigger and better, up and up and up—

but it’s the story of God coming down, becoming man, coming from no-good-Nazareth
for you!

It's a story that you get no extra credit for reading,
you can't check it off your list of things you've done for God.

That's not how the Bible works; just ask Nathanael.

It's a story, though, that will forever change your life—
it will free you, bless you, comfort you, and save you.

Not because the Bible is about you at all,
but because it's about Jesus *for you*.

And this Jesus comes to you even today.
He's sent his joyful Philip to call you to "come and see."
And better yet, as the Psalms say, "*taste* and see."

The flesh and blood Jesus comes to give you the victory He won on the cross,
the forgiveness of your sins,
the freedom from your having to keep the law—
He gives you His very life, because He loves you.

You're free.

So come with joy like Philip and Nathanael.
Hear the Word receive the Supper.
And join in His life for you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit