



“Can anything good come out of ...?”
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51
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The gospel of John, the last gospel to be written, takes a different shape and tone as compared to the other three older gospels. Matthew and Luke start with infancy narratives. Mark has no birth announcement but describes Jesus’ baptism. John’s gospel has no shepherds and sheep, donkey and ox, magi and manger, but uses a prologue to declare a pre-historical truth: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth....No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” (John 1:1, 14, 18)

Jesus’ mission, in John’s understanding, is to make God seen and known. This theme of seeing and faith that comes from seeing is woven throughout the gospel.

The gospel text for this week has a lot of seeing going on. The invitation to know who Jesus is comes with a simple, excited “Come and see!” and Jesus’ own promise: “You will see greater things than this.”, “You will see heaven opened....” John’s message is clear: The Word of God is now flesh and is a light for the world.

The disciples are all invited to “come and see.” They like the experience and use that same invitation to reach out to others. Yet, their understanding of who Jesus is falls short of what we know by reading John’s prologue: The Word was “[i]n the beginning” (John 1:1) and before creation even began. In fact, “[t]he Word was God,” the One without whom “not one thing came into being.” (v. 3) He was Life itself, and that Life was “the light of all people.” (v. 4) John’s message is all about vocation: seeking and listening.

At this stage and time, the disciples have a shortsighted understanding of Jesus and don’t fully take in the Baptist’s testimony about “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John’s testimony that “After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me,” fall on partially open ears. People take in what they are capable of taking in: faith development has many stages.

They are quick to profess him a “rabbi” (v. 38), the “Messiah” (v. 41), the “son of Joseph from Nazareth” (v. 45), but they are nowhere near to seeing the Light.

People understand what they *want* to understand, what they are *capable* of understanding.

College students in an English Literature class were instructed to write a short story which had to contain three topics: Religion, sexuality, and mystery. Only one person in the whole class got an A+. The paper was a one-liner which faithfully reported the three requirements: "Good Lord, I'm pregnant! I wonder who did it."

Even Nathanael has selective hearing. The fact that, according to Philip's words, Jesus is the one Moses and the Prophets spoke about goes over his head. He goes straight to what does not make sense to him and offends him: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (v. 46) How often do we hear with prejudice?

Nathanael's cynical remark questions the significance of Nazareth, a small backwater village of approx. 400 people located halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. This little hamlet is never mentioned in the Holy Scriptures as a place of historical or spiritual importance. Is Nathanael perhaps alluding to the *lack* of significant military resistance in Nazareth to the Roman occupation? Can a truly consequential “messiah” come from Nazareth?¹

Jesus is the one who truly “finds” people. He knows his disciples (us included) and invites us follow him and see beyond what the physical sense of sight can offer. He is obviously more than the “son of Joseph” (traceable relationship and lineage); more than a man “from Nazareth” (geographical origin); more than messianic and prophetic characteristics (biblical tradition). Jesus requires a faith-based seeing just as it happened to father Abraham (Gen 12:18.16-17).

Following him will allow the disciples to see that *he* is the place of the encounter between heaven and earth. The Son of Man becomes “this place,” “the gate of heaven,” where the revelation of God can surely be found. The “greater things” are associated with a better and more complete sight of faith in the Son of God.

Faith based on one's own biblical knowledge, messianic hope, political expectations, and social prejudices will not be enough. A faith capable of seeing greater things needs to develop. The disciples receive nothing concrete to work

¹ Archeologists have found that in the middle of the first century AD, anti-Roman rebels took advantage of the porosity of the rock to create a sizeable network of underground hiding places and tunnels underneath Nazareth — big enough to shelter at least 100 people. <https://ewtn.co.uk/article-what-we-know-about-nazareth-at-the-time-of-jesus/> and <https://christ.org/questions-and-answers/what-was-nazareth-like-in-the-first-century/>

with and even when they do receive signs, they will have to go beyond them to understand their divine meaning.

The same is true for us. Whom do we “believe” Jesus to be? It’s easy to confuse “believing” and “thinking.” Often, we use the two terms interchangeably. But “thinking” is more correctly an “opinion” sometimes based on the gathering of facts (ex., I believe/think it’s going to rain today based on the weather data collected) and sometimes based on bias.

Jesus expects a personal engagement and a discipleship journey based on humility and simplicity. He calls us out of darkness and invites us to step into his Light. Yet, the discovery of his Light is gradual and needs purification of intent. Obtuse and biased, we slowly come to him. May God have mercy on us. Yet, Jesus knows and chooses each and everyone of us. In Jesus’ eyes, there is plenty of good that can come out of...Spring Hill.

His promise to us remains clear: “You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Jesus knows me. He calls me. I want to see the glory of the Lord. Amen.