

Epiphany 2
“How do you know me?” (John 1:47-49)
January 14, 2024
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 2nd Sunday after Epiphany is from our Gospel reading, John 1:48.

“47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” 48 Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” 49 Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!””

So far the text...

“How do You know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus had described him as a true Israelite believer in the Word of God, and not just an Israelite in name only. Jesus was saying that Nathanael was not just a Jew in name only – that he didn’t believe he was saved just because of his Jewish descent. There was not a fake or a false faith in his heart that Jesus saw, but a true conviction of faith in God’s promise of the coming Messiah. Jesus spoke this description of Nathanael loud enough that he could hear him.

And seeing that Jesus had looked into his heart, and accurately described his faith, Nathanael quickly exclaims, “How do You know me?” Was it because Phillip possibly told you about my convictions? But Jesus removes all doubt about how He could know Nathanael’s heart by simply telling him, **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”** I saw you where you were under the fig tree and I saw into your heart. That could only mean one thing for Nathanael. The person talking with me is omniscient and omnipresent. And there is only One who has these characteristics – God.

So, Nathanael quickly professes his faith in Jesus. You are not only a teacher, a Rabbi but You are the Son of God.

“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

You are the One that I have been waiting all my life for. You are God in the flesh! You are the true King, the only King of Israel. To which Jesus then responds with a promise. Nathanael, you believed because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree, but you will see even greater things!

We’re just getting started. Here we go! The life of a believer in Jesus is a continual unveiling of so many wonderful works of God. It’s a life of getting to know the merciful loving God who sees us in our sin and desperation, calls us into His Kingdom of grace and shepherds us to His Kingdom of glory of eternal life.

Oh, you are going to see greater things Nathanael. You are going to see greater things believer in Christ. Jesus says **“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”**

Most certainly true, heaven has been opened by the Messiah, by the Son of Man, Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph, true Man and also true God. He has done the greatest thing that all people must see and believe. Jesus, the Lamb of God, gave His life on the cross to open the door that was shut to all sinners. He has opened the banquet hall of heaven. There is now access to heaven! There is now access to the Father. The veil of the temple was torn! Jesus, the Lamb of God, paid the sins of all people once and for all!

This is the greater thing that Nathanael would see when Jesus was crucified, buried but risen from the dead. This is the greater thing that you and I see with eyes of faith.

And it all is possible, only possible because Jesus first knows us. He first knew Nathanael. He first knew you and me. He knows everything about us. How does Jesus know you? Listen to Psalm 139 again which is our Psalm of the day.

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me.

2 You know my sitting down and my rising up;

You understand my thought afar off.

3 You comprehend my path and my lying down,

**And are acquainted with all my ways.
4 For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.
5 You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.”**

You know, in this current political cycle, those candidates who are vying for the presidency are doing their best to get the citizens of this country to know them and trust them to be their next leader. There are debates, town halls, and interviews to discuss what a candidate believes about certain issues, what a candidate plans to do to fix certain issues, and why the candidate is best qualified to do it. The Iowa caucuses this Tuesday begin to let everyone know who the people are choosing.

Of course, in politics there are the detractors and the mudslinging. There are people designated to hunt for any negative information that can be used against a candidate. One candidate shook hands with his wife the other day and there was a big news cycle about whether this appropriate or not an intimate enough display of affection.

Some people base their decision on whether or not this is a candidate that I could sit down and have a beer with. Others would say, I don't want to have a beer with the president. I just want the president to a job that makes this country more livable!

No, doubt each of us has gotten to know the candidates somewhat and maybe your decision is not fully formed yet. But, there is a response that is needed from every person, not just of voting age and not just in the United States. It is a response of to the One who is acquainted with all the ways of every man, woman and child in this world.

Jesus calls each of us at different times in our lives to follow Him. Come and see! Phillip told Nathanael. God uses His disciples to call others to know Jesus as one's Savior. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his disciples. There He is – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And two of his disciples, Andrew and John heard and began following Jesus.

Jesus knew they were following Him and Jesus took the initiative, as He always does, to invite them to get to know Him better. **“What do you seek?”**

Oh, what are soul seeks is peace with God and joy and comfort in His presence. **They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “where are You staying?”**

“Come and see”. Time with the Teacher. Time getting to know Jesus which could only lead to one conclusion for Andrew that he quickly relayed to his brother Peter.

“We have found the Messiah” (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus.”

Mark Twain once said, There are two most important days of your life – when you were born and the day you discovered why. Whether Mark Twain, who was raised in a Christian church, believed in God all his life has been debated. Only God knows. But there is truth in what Mark Twain said.

There is a God about whom Psalm 139 says these words.

**“For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb.
14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.”**

But as wonderful and important as this knowledge is, the most important day is knowing why. And that day, for the Christian, is the day that one is called by Jesus to follow Him and know Him as the Son of God and King of Israel. It is the day that one is reborn and the soul is forgiven. For the God who knows us also knows all our failings and all our sins which we cannot hide from Him. But our of pure mercy and grace, He sent His Son to die for us and take away all our sins. So that

all our days that are fashioned for us are filled with the greater things of knowing Jesus as our Savior.

The name Nathanael means “God has given”. And God gave Nathanael the gift of knowing Jesus as His Savior. And in our baptism, God has given each of a rebirth. It is a gift of knowing ourselves intimately as the sinners that we are, but knowing Jesus for who He is, the Savior who washes my sin in baptism, calls me by name and leads me all my life.

Yes, Jesus the believer well. So well that every baptized believer is united with Him as we heard in our epistle from 1 Corinthians 6:

“But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

Which then prompts Paul to remind us that we are in a battle always against the devil who wants to sever this union with the bridegroom Jesus. The devil wants a person to fall away in unbelief so that when Jesus comes again, He will say to the unbeliever, “I do not know you.” How seriously God calls us to hear His Word, repent of our sins daily and fall on His mercy and forgiveness. So Paul continued on our epistle.

18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

We are God’s. We are known intimately by God and we know Him. We know Him as the Good that comes out of Nazareth - Good Shepherd who came out of Nazareth. We know God as the prophet Micah said,

Micah 7:18

Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)