

## Worship January 17, 2021

### Welcome

I welcome you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Come into worship, and see what God has in store for us today!  
Come into God's presence and see the difference love makes!  
Come into the light and see the glory of God!  
Come and see! Come and see!

### Opening Prayer

Awesome God, you knew us before we were born. You love us into life. Open our hearts and our spirits today to hear your word for us. And, upon hearing the word, may we be convinced of our call to ministry and mission through the church. Bless us with your presence and your powerful love, for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

### Hymn UMH # 64

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty

### Scripture John 1:43-51 (NRSV)

### **Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael**

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." <sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." <sup>51</sup> And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, <sup>[a]</sup> you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

### Meditation

A few years ago while driving home from work I heard Don Shelby on WCCO radio talk about what he called "pinch me moments". My interpretation of what Shelby called "pinch me moments" are those times in your life that you can't believe something is happening to you.

I suppose there are pinch me moments that are negative, or ugly or scary but I always think of pinch me moments as beautiful, astonishing, astounding, surprising, eye-opening but never in a negative light.

A "pinch me moment" for me was recently when not one or two but three days in a row I was able to get outside in the beauty of what I can only describe as a Minnesota snow globe. We had three day of the most beautiful frost on everything in sight.

If you haven't experienced this it might be hard to imagine, but everything outdoors was covered in frost; the mailbox was covered, the fence line, the trees looked all fluffy and white, from a short distance the trees looked like they were covered in cotton balls – and for me these were pinch me moments.

Another pinch me moment was when I was about 21 or so. I worked in a non-profit agency often working with people that seemed to have the same background as me. This background included some tough times including rough childhoods, challenging family dynamics, little money and seemingly not much to look forward to.

One day I walked in on a conversation that was clearly about me but not meant for me to hear. I heard an older woman sharing some thoughts about me. What I remember about that conversation went something like "with

her background I wouldn't have thought she would have accounted for much". Friends that was a pinch me moment for me.

This woman saw something in me that I hadn't seen and at 21 I realized that all that was behind me wouldn't keep me from moving forward, being me. I have held what I heard that day close to my heart all these years. A pinch me moment.

In our scripture today from John 1:43-51 we have Jesus finding Philip and then saying to him: "Follow me." After this encounter, Phillip runs to tell his friend Nathanael, and he says "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." At this, Phillip kind of hecklings him saying, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Reminds me of my feelings before I overheard heard that old woman say "with her background I wouldn't have thought she would have accounted for much".

Well Nathanael isn't having any of it, is he? After all, "can anything good come from Nazareth? Can anything worthwhile come out of that place?"

I think we ask the same question in a lot of ways, often about ourselves...I think these questions often are what I call head-talk. Talk we don't actually verbalize but we sure can think it.

Questions we ask ourselves like

- "Can anything good come from my life?" after all I'm not educated or live in the city or...
- "Can anything good come out of my family situation?" maybe I question if growing up in poverty will prevent me from making much of myself
- "Can anything good come from someone with my personality?"
- "Can anything good come from someone who looks like me?"
- "Can anything good come from someone who struggles with the things I do?"
- "Can anything good come from someone my age?"
- "Can anything good come from someone who's failed and made mistakes like I have?"
- I've wondered about these kinds of things and more many times.

Do you have this head talk that like I do?

Let me ask you, "How are you feeling this morning?"

What motivated you to visit this YouTube channel and participate in this Worship Service? Are you feeling rested, calm and content? Has it been an inspiring week, did you accomplish what you needed to? Or was it an awful week? Do you feel like you just can't take anymore? Do you feel as if you are not good enough, whatever good enough is for you? Do you wonder is you are worth God's love, does he even God love you?

Perhaps this is how Nathanael was feeling as he sat under the fig tree that day he met Jesus. Perhaps he was simply projecting his own feelings about himself onto Nazareth...that little uneducated backward town where no one of any worth has ever come from ...when Phillip told him that he had found "the one Moses wrote about...Jesus of Nazareth..."

Maybe Nathanael had been feeling small, insignificant, unworthy. Perhaps he had been struggling with some sin, something he had done. Maybe he was feeling really down on himself maybe he felt wicked, mean, unloved even unlovable. And so, instead of kicking the dog, as the saying goes, he kicks Nazareth—"Can anything good come from there?"...

...But maybe what he is really thinking is, "Nathanael! Can anything good come from me?"

Rev Kenneth Sauer says in a message recently posted; “When we honestly look at ourselves, we might find a part of our life that we think cannot be changed; maybe it’s a secret we have carried for years, maybe it is the illness we face every day, or the addiction we hide, or the hurts we have caused, or the loneliness and lostness of grief, and we say it will never get any better.

I think that is where Nathanael was when Philip found him with the news about Jesus. And Jesus’ reply to Nathanael is brilliant. Jesus says to him: “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.” Jesus is saying, “I see you Nathanael; I know what you are like. I’ve known you since before you were born. There are no surprises for me And no different than how you or I might be **Nathanael is shocked**. “How do you know me?” Nathanael asks.

A side story from me – there was a significant amount of alcohol abuse by one of my parents. At one point in my life I decided to attend a 12-step meeting called Adult Children of Alcoholics. At this meeting they had books for sale at this meeting and bought a book. That same evening I decided to read a couple chapter of the book before going to sleep. Well I was **shocked!** I read the preface in the first couple pages and promptly shut the book and never went back to it. You see that preface contained things about me that I thought no one knew. But in reality, people having grown up with an alcoholic parent shared these things, but I didn’t know that and I was shocked thinking only I had those experiences.

A shocked Nathanael asks How do you know me and Jesus answers “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you”.

It is thought that in Bible times, if you told someone you saw them sitting under a fig tree, you were really saying two things.

- First, you are telling them that you know them inside and out.
  - It’s another way of saying, “I’ve known you since the cradle.
  - I know you better than you know yourself.”
- And second thing you are telling them is that they are part of God’s purpose in bringing God’s Kingdom to earth.

Have you ever had that feeling of someone accepting you for who you are, who you really are? it’s a powerful thing!

Rev Sauer says

It is a freeing thing. It is a life-giving thing and a transformative thing. Jesus knows us completely. He sees us like He saw Nathanael. He sees all our misgivings and questions. He understands our faults, failures and insecurities. He knows the things we’ve dared not tell anyone. He knows what makes us laugh and what makes us cry. He sees the ways we have been misjudged and misunderstood. He sees the hurts and the scars we carry. He knows our secret dreams and our wildest hopes. He understands what happened in our past and what we long for in the future. And he is not shocked by anything about us.

Jesus doesn’t close the book and never go back to it.

Jesus loves us no matter what and He died to set us free from our fears, our torment, our self-doubt, our sin.

He has great plans for us.

We always have a future with Christ.

When Nathanael realizes how much Jesus knows him...

...how well Jesus knows him...

...Nathanael recognizes Jesus as God’s Son.

And Jesus says to Nathanael, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree.

You shall see greater things than that...

I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

It seems like a strange thing for Jesus to say, doesn't it?

But Jesus is referring back to a story in Genesis, where a great father of the faith, Jacob, has a dream about a ladder that connects heaven and earth, with angels going up and down it.

Tom Wright Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St Andrews paraphrases what Jesus is saying this way: "If you follow me, you'll be watching what it looks like when heaven and earth are open to each other."

Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth. What a thought!

He is, quite literally, the Stairway to Heaven. Not a stairway to heaven like Led Zeppelin sings about but our stairway to heaven.

And so, when we follow Jesus, we are not only known and understood and accepted in such a way that we come to love God and ourselves, but we are invited into a whole new way of seeing everybody and everything.

As one person has written, "We are invited to glimpse through the holes in the fabric of the universe to the REALITY that lies beyond.

We are invited to see people, places and things in a new way with new clear eyes.

We're invited to watch and wait with expectancy, to see how God is at work, to see what happens when the curtain is pulled back and 'righteousness and peace kiss each other,' as the Psalmist puts it psalm 85:10."

You know, now, perhaps more than any other period in my lifetime people are angry...

...and I mean, really, really angry. There is a craziness to our existence right now.

Between the Pandemic, racial turmoil and political unrest people are feeling angry and scared. Not knowing what the future holds creates all these emotions.

It's as if fear has us in a headlock, a grip on us that we can't seem to break.

Perhaps we are in this grip because we are looking for a savior in all the wrong places.

I mean, I have never seen people so politicized as I do now.

The political parties have practically become a new religion.

Politicians are taking the place of god.

We are gambling with our salvation on worldly things and not kingdom things.

And this frustrates us and makes us angry because there is no salvation in worldly things.

It also causes us to fear. We fear other people. We fear what the future holds.

We fear that what we once had is gone for good. Taken away and never to be brought back.

But my friends, in God there is no fear.

We belong to another Kingdom, do not let hatred, prejudice, and self-doubt block the entrance to heaven.

Jesus Christ has overcome this world and we were born under the sign of the cross!

The only thing that is forever is God. The only thing that truly matters is Jesus Christ.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth,” Nathanael asks.

People are often judged by where they come from, by the way they speak, by the political party they belong to, by the color of their skin and their status in society.

Not so, in God’s Kingdom.

In God’s Kingdom everyone is welcomed, accepted, loved.

Jesus saw something in Nathanael that surprised him.

Instead of seeing a terrible, no good sinner...

...instead of seeing a failure, someone out of whom nothing good could come...

...Jesus saw a person created in the image of God.

He saw someone with a great future.

Jesus saw Nathanael sitting under that fig tree...He knew everything about him and loved him no matter what

And if Nathanael was to follow Jesus, he would see “heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

When you see this, you can never be the same again.

When you see this, you will never look at yourself, look at God nor look at others the same way again.

When you see this the anger and rage will fade away.

There is no more reason to sneer and say, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”

You know it’s interesting.

When Nathanael doubts and makes fun of Philip for what he tells him, Philip doesn’t judge Nathanael.

He doesn’t get angry at him. He simply invites, “Come and see.”

Come and see if anything good can come out of a place like Nazareth. Come and see for yourself.

And what Nathanael finds is that God opens up a new life for him. God gives meaning to people who otherwise lacked meaning God instills love and salvation into people who were at the end of their rope, had hit rock bottom and didn’t think there was a reason to go on.

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” You bet it can!

The King of Glory comes from there.

And when we open ourselves up to Him, the King of Glory comes from us as well...shining out into a dark and terribly sad world.

May it be so.

Praise God.

Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

Patient and Wise God, you have called this church into being to serve you in this world by helping others. We rejoice in the many ways we are able to be of help. We offer our prayers for each other, for those near and dear to us, for the situations of difficulty and strife in community and world. You hear our voices cry out and with your eternal compassion you respond in loving care to each of us. We gather this day, celebrating fellowship and friendship, welcoming each other in your name. You remind us that you are with us always. What have we to fear? But we fear far too often the unknown tasks that lie ahead of us. We always want to be assured of the happy outcome of our efforts. Help us to trust your guidance and presence, Lord. Help us remember that there is no time in which we are out of your care. Enable us to be in serving ministry and mission with joy and confidence. Heal our wounds, bind up our bruises and broken spirits. Put us on a pathway of peace.

For we ask this in Jesus' Name who taught us to pray as one.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

**Hymn**                    UMH # 452 (verses 1 and 3)                    My Faith Looks Up to Thee

### **Offering**

MARK 12:41–44

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."  
The poor widow felt called to give what she had, what do you feel called to give?

### **Prayer of Dedication**

Lord may my giving be pleasing to you this day. I have much and I desire to please you with much. Bless what I give Lord, multiply it and use it to advance your Kingdom. In your holy name, amen

**HYMN** UMH # 451 (verses 1 and 2) Be Thou My Vision

### **Benediction**

Go into the world, listening for God's call in your lives.  
Go into the world, ready to follow Jesus Christ.  
Go into the world, sustained by the love and power  
of the Holy Spirit. Amen.