

A Sermon for DaySpring

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“You Will See”

John 1: 43-51

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How is it that you know what you know? And how is it that you know what you know you know?

How is it that you perceive what you perceive?

See what you see?

Hear what you hear?

Especially when it comes to what is spiritual... how do you see whatever it is you see and how is it that you're sure you're seeing what is really there?

It must be hard and it must be rare... that folks are able to see the truth because Jesus is all the time saying and praying that we might have **ears to hear and eyes to see.**

Why isn't it plain? Why, Jesus, would you speak in parables so that, **“Seeing we would not see and hearing... not understand?”**

Why is it, that the **“Word of the Lord is rare”**... as the author of Samuel put it? Why is it that visions aren't commonplace, as the story goes on to say? Ever longed for a vision... some confirmation?

How is it that we know what we know? How do we see and have any certainty that it's not an illusion?

Over the past few weeks, I've been preaching about our church...

What this is... this place where people show up, faithfully show up... they are here over and over again and because of that may get in on what God is up to. That was our New Year's Day sermon.

Then, it was what we are, we are this confessional, Baptist, contemplative, authentic community. Three Cs and a B, if you're trying to commit them to memory.

And last week, over lunch at Chili's... there was this indirect sermon on what we teach. And what is taught over and over is that salvation isn't simply about some pass through the pearly gates you get for being good or knowing all the right answers to the doctrinal quiz.

Salvation is not, “God has to let you in now that Jesus has died and you prayed the right prayer.” No, salvation is about the transformation of who you are and what the world is.

So... here in this season of Epiphany... disclosure, we're talking about who we are and what we are as a church... What we believe and teach.

And I want to add to the list we're making this morning and next week and talk about what we do. And what it is we do together is... we see.

That's how you see what you see?

John's gospel is about just that and especially this passage. And what is clear from the start and important for us this morning is that this business of perceiving is a group project.

People in John's gospel are waking up to who Jesus is but always in the context of some relationship... There's someone bearing witness.

Here in these early paragraphs, you have John the Baptist preparing the way and pointing to Christ... referring his own disciples, **“Look, there goes the Lamb of God.”**

Then Andrew goes and gets Simon Peter...

Then Philip goes and finds Nathanael...
There is always a someone who helps us with our seeing.

It was that way, too, in our Old Testament story. How is it someone hears the call of God. Samuel hears... the story says, **he didn't yet know the Lord**. How does he hear? Well, there's Hannah... and her faith and her bringing Samuel to the temple. There's a family.

And there's Eli, this old priest... he's been around. God was trying to speak to Samuel, trying to call Samuel... but there had to be an Eli and there had to be a Hannah... and there'll have to be Hannahs here at DaySpring and Elis and Philips too... if we're to hear.

And especially if our children and our young people are to hear.

God calls...God engages... and speaks. I wonder if over in our nursery this morning, there's a young girl playing with blocks that God might be calling to be a pastor.

Is there a boy in this room this morning, coloring on a worship guide, who might be called to make a difference in the third world?

Is there a teenager... she has great artistic abilities but needs to hear God's call to think of her art vocationally?

We're not just talking today about hearing calls to ministry... but I do want us to be intentional about that as a church and in our business meeting next week will be inviting us to join the *Shiloh Network*, which is a group of churches committed to that very thing.

Who will be the next generation of preachers and missionaries? Will there be leaders in our community and nation shaped by deep faith? Writers who will inspire the best in us? Peacemakers? Homemakers? Business leaders with a kingdom vision? Are they here this morning? And how will they hear God's call?

How will you? Probably not by yourself... Nathanael didn't. There was a friend, Philip, who helped him. When it comes to seeing what's real, there's generally always a somebody.

But do notice, that Nathanael doesn't jump up right away. His good friend, Philip finds him and can't wait to tell him the good news. **"We've found him... that One with a capital O we've all been waiting for... he's from Nazareth."**

And Philip expects Nathaniel to jump up and run off to see this Messiah... but he just looks up from the book he's reading there under the fig tree. A little insight into who Nathanael was, by the way. The fig tree was a place for reflection and devotion. It's where you went to study... usually out on the side of your house in the shade... to get deep... to search.

Later Jesus says, **"Now there goes a true Israelite..."** The word Israelite means the one who wrestles with God. Remember Jacob's story and his nightlong wrestling match with God... He gets a new name, Israel... **"The one who wrestles with God and survives."**

That's who Nathanael is. He's one who makes his way to fig trees often... to wrestle... to think... engage the questions that matter the most.

He's a true **"Israelite... a real wrestler... one in whom there's no deceit... he's honest."** There's no pretending... no cliché faith... no borrowed faith.

So, there under the fig tree... he looks up and takes the long piece of grass out of his mouth, and says, **"Nothin' good's comin' outa Nazareth."**

Nathaniel offers no Amen. And do notice, there is no scolding of his doubting. There never is in John's gospel. No shaming.

A community where doubt isn't allowed will always become a sick community (Craddock).

If we're going to be a community of discernment for one another... this must be a place where the Nathanaels in our midst can say freely, **"I doubt it..."** and not hear gasps... and not worry that we're all going to try and fix them... or argue with them.

Notice, that's not what Philip does. He doesn't say, **"Dang it Nathanael, do you always have to be so negative."**

He doesn't start debating, **"Look Nathanael... in the first place, he was born in Bethlehem... second... the Baptizer pointed at him... third... he's an amazing teacher."**

Philip just invites... **"Come and see."** That's the nature of witness... that's the part we play... **"Come and see... I go to this church and my life is different... want to come see?"**

Communities of discernment invite people to see for themselves what God has revealed.

As one who identifies with Nathanael... who came forth from the wound asking "why," I'm glad he had a friend like Philip and I'm glad that he goes... That impresses me. Nathaniel is a humble cynic.

So... he has his doubts... but he goes. He goes in part because he knows we have a great capacity for fooling ourselves and seeing what we want to see... hearing what validates who we are. And, sure, Philip might be doing that... but also... he might be doing that.

Communities who discern well are more humble than they are certain. They know how hard it is to really see... and they've heard churches blabber about God's will as if it's always apparent. And they've heard too many Christians chit chat about God speaking and the Lord saying this or that...

Communities who discern well, know that's not the norm. They know Jesus invites us to doubt what we think we know...

He said in John chapter nine, **"because you think you see... your blind as a bat. If you knew you were blind, then you might be able to see."**

Many of the Eastern Fathers were fond of saying, **"If you can explain it, it's not true."** (Richard Rohr) God is... the world is... we are... a great mystery and it's all so full of paradox... we better have some humility about it as we start.

There should be a pause as we talk about knowing what we know we know, huh? Paul Tillich suggested that we should stutter, when we speak of God. God is really big and we're really small... and we're really, really broken.

So... when we hear brothers and sisters of the faith, confident that they've seen God, we should probably be a bit cynical... like Nathaniel, we should hesitate to say any Amen to prophecies offered too simply and easily.

Seeing clearly isn't where any of us start.

Have you had one of those moments, yet, when you broke through all the protective stuff around yourself and finally saw what was there? How hard it is, perhaps, for you to really love? How much your own life is centered, maybe, in your self and in agendas you didn't even know you had?

It's taken me years to wake up and smell those roses.

Any of you know what that's about?

Finally seeing?

It'd have helped if there was a community around us saying, **"Slow down... be humble... you may not be seeing what's real."**

We just tend to be blind.

Did you notice in the Psalm today... right in the middle of one of the most beautiful, prayerful confessions ever written. **“God... I sure hate our enemies... Wish you’d wipe them out.”** And then, as if he’s totally oblivious to his own sin, **“Search me, God and see if you can find anything offensive in me.”**

It’s just hard to see what’s true about yourself... and the Psalmist validates that, even as he confesses how unfathomable and amazing God is. But... he does do that... the rest of the Psalm is an utterance of deep humility. **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.”**

Nathanael has enough humility to get up and to go see... and he does... and as he does, he is seen.

Notice that... in this story and all through John’s gospel. Notice that there is an encounter with Christ, in which the person is seen, and that seeing precipitates their seeing. Jesus sees first and sees into the heart.

And don’t do a Superman thing in your mind... where you say, **“Well, there goes Jesus using his divine x-ray vision again.”** These aren’t messianic parlor tricks... Divine ESP ... Don’t have God just walking around in a human costume Jesus suit pretending to be human but not really being human. That’s a heresy.

Jesus is human and Jesus perceives because that’s what happens when the heart is pure, when the heart isn’t divided, when the inner being isn’t clouded. Spiritual seeing is what happens when someone is so mature spiritually and they know their own oneness and unity with God and everything else.

All through John, Jesus looks into people.

Nathanael... he has a vision of him under that fig tree... many Saints had this ability. He perceives his character immediately.

In chapter two when Jesus has cleansed the temple and angered the officials, John tells us that Jesus knew what was in their hearts.

In chapter three, Jesus nails Nicodemus... he knows him and how stuck he is, **“You’ve got to be born again.”**

In chapter four, he tells the woman at the well all about herself and her sin.

In chapter five, he ask the man who’s been laying crippled by the pool for 38 years if he wants to get well, implying that perhaps he was one who would just as soon hang on to his brokenness.

He knew Judas would betray him...

He knew the disciples were competitive...

The Pharisees’ were hateful.

He could see them... and generally his seeing proceeded their seeing. Nathanael sees who Jesus is after Jesus sees who Nathanael is.

We perceive because we are perceived.

We know because we’re known...

Love because he first loved us.

There is this encounter with the divine first... and communities who want to help people see have to remember that. We have to have the theology of the Psalmist. **“God you know us... know our thoughts... our uniqueness. You are completely intimate with us... we are only and always in your presence and it cannot be escaped even if we try.”** Do you see how different that is than the notion of God playing hide and seek with himself and his will?

He Loves...

He knows...

God is closer to us than we are to ourselves (Augustine)

Wake up to a God who is like that, who knows and sees us and is one with us, and perhaps we'll start seeing things.

And seeing a lot according to Jesus. You'll see angels... messengers with their messages... going up and down... back and forth between heaven and earth.

Jesus is using a familiar image to Nathanael. Remember Jacob's dream? (We're back to Jacob again.) He saw angels on a ladder, back in Genesis. Going up and down and up and down between heaven and earth.

Well... Jesus is the ladder... and what happens when we follow Him is that we come to perceive how it is that heaven and earth are connected and connected in Christ. That's what we come to discern. That's the big discernment. Oh, there'll be smaller things here and there...divine hints about this or that...The big thing is seeing the intersection of heaven and earth...And it is "we."

Jesus does a familiar and amazing little thing here... When he says, "**You shall see...**" he's no longer talking to Nathanael... He's talking to us all. It's plural, "**you all.**" Jesus goes from encountering Nathanael to preaching to us all. He's talking to the community.

Because that's where we can discern... It's in the Church where we see this ladder that is Christ and heaven and earth are one.

That's where discipleship leads us... to real seeing and knowing... of what is most true. We start hearing the word of the Lord... And so, again we say together.

Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

As we know and love and befriend one another...

Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

In our worship and study, in our playing and in our praying...

Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

As we teach and nurture our children and as we cultivate an atmosphere of call...

Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

As we humbly open ourselves to the mystery of every life, the possibility of everyday, and the beauty of all creation...

Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

Like Eli... Like Samuel... Like the Psalmist... Like Nathanael...

Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

Amen.

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