**John 1:43-51**

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

Grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As many of you know, I grew up in Salem, Oregon. I was raised in the South part of town which was considered the nicer part of town. This isn’t exactly true, but it was certainly the perception. It was also the perception that the further south you went, the nicer it got. I attended South Salem High School – Home of the Saxons.

Although most of our country glorifies accomplishments for High School and Collegiate athletics, my high school was different. Because to be completely honest – we were pretty TERRIBLE in the athletic arenas. My freshman year of high school we did not win ONE football game. Freshman, JV, or Varsity. Not ONE! Where we did excel and achieve was in the arts. Particularly music.

My high school has a long history of musical excellence – it was not uncommon for the top musical groups in band, choir, and orchestra, to win the State Ensemble Championship for a 6A high school. (I say the top groups because when I was in high school we had 4 bands, 4 choirs, and 3 different orchestral groups. Those are only the concert ensembles. When you added in marching band, pep band, jazz groups, etc… there were many, many, many more opportunities to express your musical passions.)

We had pep rallies for music. Wrap your head around that one! I myself was a Choral State Champion my senior year of high school. I would have been my Junior year as well – if it hadn’t been… for Sprague High. Or as we used to call them Spragoo.

This was the high school that was located just slightly further south in Salem. They were our huge rival. We hated those guys. Their school colors were orange and brown – so naturally, we called them all “Pumpkin Heads.” Super original, and very derogatory, I know. What can I say – high school music nerds aren’t known for their super creative and biting slurs. Growing up you could not have convinced me that anything good could come out of Sprague High. They were the worst. They were the enemy.

In our Gospel text this morning, Jesus is in the process of calling his disciples. In the text immediately preceding this, Jesus has called Andrew and Peter as his disciples. In this morning’s text he find’s Philip (who is from Bethsaida, which happens to be the same town as Andrew and Peter) and calls him as well. Philip is clearly quite excited and runs off to find his buddy Nathanael.

He catches up with Nathanael underneath a fig tree. He tells Nathanael that they have found him who Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote of. And it’s Jesus – son of Joseph – from Nazareth.

Nathanael isn’t so quick to jump on the Jesus is Messiah bandwagon. I mean – come on… NAZARETH??? Which is exactly what he says. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth???” I think Nazareth and Bethsaida may have had a bit of a South Salem vs. Sprague kind of relationship.

Philip tells Nathanael to “Come and see.” And so he does. Now Jesus, being, you know, GOD – knows exactly what Nathanael has said about him. And he’s not having that kind shade thrown in his direction without some kind of reciprocation. As Nathanael walks toward him he says – “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

Pastor Schul pointed out in Staff Meeting this week that the Israelite Nation was founded on deceit as it all began when Jacob stole Esau’s birthright by lying. I mean, he was known as Jacob the liar! So, this comment by Jesus is total snark.

Nathanael, not knowing that Jesus knows about the whole Nazareth bashing thing, is wondering what this dudes damage is. And asks him how he would know? When exactly did they meet? Jesus replies “I saw you – under the fig tree before Philip called you.” And therefore, by implication – heard the whole thing! Whoops!

Nathanael has an instantaneous change of perspective. He proclaims “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Apparently – something good can come out of Nazareth after all.

Jesus asks if he believes this because he told him he saw him under the fig tree – and then tells him he’s going to see much greater things than these. Just you wait, Nathanael, just you wait!

This text is incredibly poignant this week. It was impossible to miss the media barrage following comments about certain countries immigrants – and their worth. Those from Africa, those from Haiti, those from El Salvador. Similar comments have been made in the past regarding immigrants from the Middle East as well.

The somewhat sanitized version of what was said was – Can anything good come out of these countries? The implication being that nothing can and those who came to the United States fleeing violence and oppression are wastes of our time.

I suppose if you have never had any direct contact with anyone from these places then that might be an easier pill to swallow – just like it was easier for Nathanael to think poorly of Nazareth prior to meeting Jesus. It’s amazing how personal connection transforms us.

For me personally, when I heard of this comment, I didn’t think about those living in Africa as nameless and faceless individuals. I immediately thought of my good friend, Pastor Emmanuel Jackson, who is the Senior Pastor at Living Word Lutheran in Katy, Texas which is the fastest growing ELCA congregation in the Houston area. Emmanuel was born in Liberia and his family fled after his father was murdered by Liberian rebels. He is my dear friend and he is an incredible pastor who is a huge asset to our denomination. Can anything good come out of Africa? Yes. Yes it can.

I also thought about the people I met when I went to Central America. Although they had so much less than we have here – they were warm and welcoming and generous. One village that I visited cooked an elaborate meal for our group, with no desire or expectation of compensation or reward. They did it because hospitality is an ingrained part of who they are.

During our return layover in the San Salvador airport – I was INCREDIBLY sick. A woman working at the airport newsstand brought me a bottle of water and a package of mint gum. She would not accept payment. She saw a sick and suffering traveler and she reached out with compassion. Can anything good come out of El Salvador? Yes. Yes it can.

Around the turn of the 20th Century a Syrian immigrant, named Khalil Atiyeh, came to the United States at 12-years-old. He worked hard. He served during World War I with Roosevelts Rough Riders. He eventually married a fellow immigrant named Anisee Haddad. They had 4 children. 11 grandchildren. And many, many great grandchildren. Of which, I am one. Can anything good come out of the Middle East? Yes. Yes it can.

And wouldn’t you know, by a twist of fate – my younger brother and sister-in-law bought a house in the Sprague school district and my new twin nephews will some day be Pumpkin Heads… perish the thought! So – can anything good come out of Sprague High? Well – I suppose, yes. Yes it can. And it will.

Good things come from all places. Nathanael learned that the Messiah, the son of God, the King of Israel… came from Nazareth. And that man from Nazareth showed him amazing things… just as he promised he would. Jesus transformed his life. And Jesus continues to transform our lives today.

Jesus gathers all kinds of different people from all kinds of different places together. Our diversity and differences are one of our greatest assets. Yet, in Baptism we are all transformed from African, or Haitian, or Syrian, or El Salvadoran, or Norwegian, or American to Children of God. Gathered, welcomed, loved. In Holy Communion we are all fed the same heavenly food. No one is more worthy or deserving than another. We are all God’s people. Every last one of us. Even those Pumpkin Heads from Spragoo. Amen.