

March 30, 2003

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

Can Anything Good Come From Nazareth?

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "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."

46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Today is the big game! Many in America and around the world will be watching the Super Bowl. In game today is a player named Jerry Rice. He's been playing professional football since 1985. Usually young talented athletes are discovered because played for some legendary college team... but he didn't. Jerry Rice played for a virtual unknown university. We don't expect something good to come from a small unknown university. He was once asked, "Why did you attend such a small, obscure university. Rice responded, "Out of all big-time schools to want me, this small school was the only one to come to my house and give a personal visit."

A great player was found because of that personal invitation

In our text for this morning, Phillip comes to Nathaniel and proclaims that he has found the one whom Moses wrote about. He is Jesus of Nazareth. While we do not know what expression Nathaniel had on his face when he responded, I think that it is safe to say that his response revealed a cynical sneer.

"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Phillip answered: "Come and see."

It wasn't that Nazareth was a bad place. It just wasn't an obvious place of significance.

You see, the church has the same problem. People sit back under the fig tree with the sneer of a Nathaniel and we ask, "Can anything good come from the American Church of the Nazarene? Can anything good come from Iglesia del Nazareno Hispana de Patchogue? Can anything good come from their programs, from their Sunday School or other activities?" People may look at this church with skepticism and wonder if anything good can come from it. Even people who come in and out of these doors may wonder. You have a good leader, a good pastor. But, it is important that he has at least one follower. Do you believe anything good can come to people who are invited to this church? We still have doubting Thomases in our churches.

Nathaniel was transformed. He became a follower of Jesus (why?) because Phillip invited him.

Let me ask you: What was it that Phillip saw in Christ that moved him to follow, that stirred him so to invite his friend Nathaniel? "Come and see," Phillip said. Come and see what? What did Phillip see in Jesus of Nazareth? I want to attempt to answer that question this morning. Come and see what?

1. First, come and see the souls redeemed.

First, Phillip asked Nathanael to come and see the souls redeemed. The day before Andrew followed Jesus and invited Peter. Then Phillip invited Nathanael. There were eight others who would become Jesus' inner circle, 12 in all. This was just the beginning. Soon there was 70, the Scriptures tell us. The net of redemption that was cast was large even in those early days. Hundreds were soon following, by the end of the century half a million. Of all different nationalities. Today souls are being redeemed in South America and Africa at ten times the rate of North America and Europe. The church's work is not yet done. Now (today) we have a great opportunity to reach people from all over the world for Christ, right here in America.

But it was Andrew who made the first invitation to his brother and Phillip who made the second to a friend. They were watching as people began to place their lives in the hands of this Nazarene. They listened as Jesus spoke to people in a way that made them understand their lives better than they understood them themselves. They had seen souls redeemed just as they had seen their own redeemed. So when Phillip asked Nathanael to come and see he knew Jesus would redeem Nathanael as well.

I know that every Christian here believes that God can redeem a soul. I know you believe that. So I ask you from this moment on to live like Phillip. Go out and ask someone to come and see. Invite to bible study, invite them to Sunday school, invite them to worship service, invite them to some other church activity.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if each one, at least once a month, invited another person to "Come and See? Wouldn't it be wonderful if "Come and See" became a natural part of our life and relationships? Only Jesus can forgive sin and give Eternal Life. Come and see. Believe and you will see the glory of God. Come and see. Then invite others to come and see too. What did Phillip see in Jesus of Nazareth? First, he saw souls redeemed.

2. Second, come and see the lives transformed. What Phillip saw was not only people whose sins were forgiven but whose lives were changed. People's lives were being transformed. Today Jesus is still transforming peoples lives.

Through the power of Christ, men and women have broken the chains of sinful habit. They have renounced selfishness. The ungodly have become reverent, the drunken sober, the wicked pure. Souls that have borne the likeness of Satan have become transformed into the image of God. The weak have found strength. The downcast have found joy. The fearful have found courage. The faithless have become faithful. Those in despair have found hope. Emptiness has been filled with peace and love. This change is in itself the miracle of miracles.

The fact is that the only thing in this world which is for every person is Christ. The good news of Jesus is for every person. The love of God in Christ Jesus and the transforming power, which can bring holiness into life, is for every person.

Do you believe that? I once was addicted to drugs. Someone told me about Jesus and invited me to their church, a Church of the Nazarene. I asked Jesus to forgive my sin and change my life and he did. I am so thankful that someone invited me to "come and see." I invite you to come and see Jesus transform your life. And when He has changed you, then you must tell others.

Nathan Williams told of two men who had been business partners for over twenty years. They met one Sunday morning as they were leaving a restaurant. One of them asked, "Where are you going this morning?" "I'm going to play golf. What about you?" The first man responded rather apologetically, "I'm going to church." The other man said, "Why don't you give up that church stuff?" The man asked, "What do you mean?" "Well, we have been partners for twenty years. We have worked together, attended board meetings together, and had lunch together, and all of these twenty years you have never asked me about going to church. You have never invited me to go with you. Obviously, it doesn't mean that much to you."

John A. Stroman, *God's Downward Mobility*, CSS Publishing Company, 1996.

I know that if you have experienced the transforming power of Jesus in your life it does mean a lot to you. Share it. Invite others to experience what you have.

3. Third, come and see the heaven's opened.

In the OT [Gen 28:12-17 -12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."]

Jacob had a dream in which he saw a stairway going from earth and reaching to Heaven. Jesus is now that stairway. Jesus opened heaven to us. Through Him we have a relationship with God. Through Him we experience the blessings of heaven the favor of God. All the blessings and promises of God are yours in Christ. You will see miracles, you will see your number grow. You will see people redeemed and transformed. The Lord is in this place. Can anything good come from here? Yes, for this is none other than the house of God. And He says to you too, "I am with you and will watch over."

Do you remember the Mercedes TV commercial a few years ago that showed a Mercedes crashing into a concrete wall during a safety test? An engineer in a white lab coat walks over after the crash and kneels down to examine the damage, which is minimal. A reporter then asks the engineer about Mercedes' energy absorbing car body. After the engineer tells all about the unique design the reporter asks him why Mercedes doesn't enforce their patent on the design, a design evidently copied by several other companies because of its success.

The engineer then replies matter-of-factly, "Because some things in life are too important not to share." How true this is. There are many things in life that fall into this "too important not to share" category. Advances in science, in medicine, in technology. But all of these pale in importance to that of sharing our faith.

Rev. Steve Jackson, Sermon: "Come and See"

Invite others to come and see. What you have here is too important not to share: Souls redeemed, Lives transformed, heaven opened and blessings poured out. Yes, what you have here is too important not to share. Invite others to come and see ... Jesus and what He can do in their lives.