

Seeing in a New Way

John 1:34; Psalm 139:1-14

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There are numerous experiences in life that are impossible to adequately explain. To fully appreciate them you need to be able to “come and see”. Growing up I remember my Dad inviting me to “come and see” a newborn calf. It is amazing to see a calf go from birth to walking and eating in 10 to 90 minutes.

I remember my parents calling us to “come and see”, to step out of the barn on a frigid, January morning at 4:30 am to be warmed by the dazzling dance of the Northern lights. I have delighted in inviting people to backpack to “come and see” beautiful scenery, hiking above the clouds and looking down on the robust colors of alpine meadows.

How do you “come and see” the love of family and friends? Many of the best moments of my life feature shared love with Leslie and my family. How do you come and see the joy, peace, grace, transformation and renewal of your relationship with Jesus? What experiences in your life are you eager to invite another to “come and see”?

Our scripture today celebrates how Jesus enables us to see in new ways. We are invited to “come and see” God in the goodness around us. We are invited to “come and see” the in breaking of heaven into the world and into our lives through Jesus.

The gospel of John explains, in **John 1:43-46**, **“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown. Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” “Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.**

Philip discovered a new way of seeing through Jesus. Philip saw himself and all of creation as forgiven, loved and being renewed. Philip was seeing Jesus’ love and service which will resurrect all. In passionate, joyous excitement Philip invites his friend Nathanael to “come and see” Jesus.

Nathanael immediately erects a wall of blindness full of skepticism and prejudice which you hear in his scowl “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nathanael had his own preconceived notions of what the Messiah was to be like and where Jesus was to hail from. Nathanael was a great student of Scripture, but he had studied it through the skewed lens of the religious leaders. Nathanael was looking for a royal Messiah who would save with power and justice. Nathanael felt he knew God and the way God works and loves.

It can be hard to see what is in plain sight. Sometimes we can’t see God because we have put God in a box. We can’t see because we expect God to be, act and reveal Himself in certain ways.

Sometimes we can't see the people who are closest to us, because we think we already know everything about them. We can't fully love them because our thoughts about them or our expectations for them, give us a distorted view of them. Sometimes we can't even see ourselves, because our vision is blurred by denial and self-delusion, or by insecurity and self-hate, or by fear and guilt. If we are unable to see ourselves and those we love, then it is extremely difficult to truly see others and the world. Sometimes we can't see because of what we think we know about ourselves and who we are looking at—those people from the wrong side of town or the wrong side of the world or on the wrong side of the issue.

How are you blinded by skepticism and prejudice? How are you blinded by your definitions and expectations of God? How do you distort love? How do you fail to see God because you doubt God is working in a certain way, doubt that God can be seen in certain areas, doubt that God is really working to redeem all? How often are you unable to see through the haze of your life and this world to God's renewing glory? How are you unaware of God by your judgment that God does not love in a certain way?

Undeterred Philip invites Nathanael to "come and see". **John 1:47 "As they approached, Jesus said, "Now here is a genuine son of Israel-- a man of complete integrity."** Jesus lovingly greets Nathanael with a compliment. Nathanael glares back with a frosty question. **John 1:48-49 "How do you know about me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, "I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you." Then Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God-- the King of Israel!"**

What is the cause of the sudden change from spiritual blindness to sight, from skeptic prejudice to bold faith? Several Biblical scholars and pastors believe Nathanael's transformation was partially due to what he was doing under the fig tree.

Robert Allen writes. "Nathanael dared to have important dreams as he sat in the cool, leafy shade of the fig tree, dreams about the coming of the Messiah. Dreams are the stuff life is made of," Robert encourages us to get in touch with our dreams and to dream big like Nathanael did.

Paul Flesner writes, "Nathanael had retreated to his fig tree for quiet reflection and prayer. He was a person sincerely hoping for and searching for the Messiah. Paul encourages us to renew ourselves through worship, prayer and quiet meditation like Nathanael did.

King Oehmig writes, "The fig tree was a proper place to study the Torah. Sitting under a fig tree was also a symbol of peace and security." King encourages us to meditate on God's word, for following God's word will lead us to abundant life.

Lowell Grisham writes, "The fig tree is a metaphor for one's home." Jesus truly sees Nathanael. Jesus revealed that God knows everything about Nathanael, that God fully understands him. Jesus truly knew him. Every position I researched on this text were in agreement that the key aspect of Nathanael's transformation was Jesus truly seeing and knowing Nathanael. **John 1:48 "Nathanael asked Jesus, 'Where did you get to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you'"**

The psalmist proclaimed. **Psalm 139:1-14 "O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me**

to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night-- but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous-- how well I know it.

O Lord you know everything about me. You see me. You know all my faults yet you still love me and call me to love and serve in Your name. As Nathanael approached, Jesus called him a “genuine son of Israel”. Jesus is calling him a wrestler with God. Jacob was transformed by his wrestling match with God so much so that his name was changed from Jacob to Israel.

Jacob was a scoundrel, a liar and a con artist. Jacob took every short cut available. He manipulated even his parents and brother, stealing from them on numerous occasions. God knew all of Jacob’s many sins and God knew the wake of pain Jacob left everywhere he went. Jacob’s wrestling match began when he starting seeing in a new way. He saw that God truly knew him yet God still loved him. We see because God sees us. We love because God loves us. We know because God knows us. We are capable of loving, seeing and knowing only because God first loves, sees and knows us. When we realize God loves, sees and knows us, the wrestling match begins. When one wrestles with God they see more of themselves, their strengths and weakness, their tarnished goodness. They are transformed, become more pure, blessed and are renamed. When Isaiah saw God his lips were purified, his speech was purified, and then he was sent by God to be a prophet. When Mary saw God she became a humble servant then she was empowered to bring Jesus into our lives.

Jesus called Nathanael a “genuine son of Israel--a man of integrity”. A person of integrity wrestles with God. They strive to see, know and love as God sees, knows and loves. They strive to see God’s will. They strive to get God’s will, their thoughts, their actions, their life, and their relationships all in harmony. A person of integrity knows themselves. They are aware and honest about their mistakes however instead of dwelling on their mistakes they strive to improve, to grow, to be authentic.

The sudden change in Nathanael was brought about by Jesus truly seeing, knowing and loving him. We are invited to see in a new way by Jesus who sees, knows and loves us. Seeing in a new way is a lifelong quest. As Jesus disciple Nathanael saw that nothing is as it first appears. When you truly see Jesus the whole world looks different. An adulteress about to be stoned is no longer seen as a person to judge and condemn rather they are seen as a fellow sinner needing the forgiving grace of God standing among sinners in need of forgiveness. A despised tax collector is now seen as a hospitable friend eager to change, eager to see in a new way. A mob of hungry people is now seen as an opportunity to share your food. Enemies who hurt you are seen as people who are unaware, people who are unable to see; therefore you forgiving love them in hopes of enabling them to see in a new way. A traitorous friend who betrays you at a crucial moment is now seen as a faithful rock whose renewed love will inspire you and others to do amazing things for God. Jesus truly sees us and invites us to truly see others.

When John the Baptist asked from prison, “is Jesus the Messiah? Jesus responded **Matthew 11:4-5 “Go back to John and tell him about what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the Good News is being preached to the poor.”** Jesus disciples see God at work in ways that can easily go unnoticed. Sometimes one can get so caught up in longing to see Jesus face to face that they miss the face of Jesus in the person sitting next to them, in the waitress at a restaurant, in the clerk at the store. True disciples of Jesus see the world differently. They are able to set aside their rigid expectations and wrestle, explore, investigate, ask questions. When they see God working in ways that don’t fit their assumptions they change their thinking, letting more and more of the truth into their life ever expanding their mind, heart, life and sight.

Seeing is a renewing spiral. You see that God sees you. You strive to see God. You see a new facet of God’s will. You strive to live it with integrity which renews you, inspiring you to “come and see” more of Jesus.

Nathanael’s new way of seeing was just the beginning. **John 1:50-51 “Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And Jesus 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.”**

When you strive to see Jesus more and more of heaven will be revealed to you. In time you may be able to see in new dimensions, to see angels caring for you and the entire cosmos.

You are invited to see in a new way, to see the blessings, abundant life and cleansing grace of God, to see God transforming, renewing and redeeming yourself, to see angels bringing heaven into our world, bringing heaven into your life. Jesus is saying to you “come and see”. Amen