

Mission Reflection

for the Season of Epiphany

Seafarers International House



Scripture

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” 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 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.”¹

Message

It’s a fascinating dialogue:

Phil: *“You want to meet Jesus from Nazareth?”*

Nat: *“Why waste my time—nothing worthwhile comes from Nazareth.”*

Jesus: *“I saw you under a tree.”*

Nat: *“Clearly, you are the Lord.”*

One commentator has observed that while Nathaniel is no “Mr. Personality”, clearly he had an epiphanous moment. Apparently, epiphanies of Christ come to different people in radically different and even incomprehensible ways.²

The story is recounted of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who having received yet another evening telephone threat (“*If you aren’t out of this town in three days, we’re going to blow up your house and blow your brains out.*”), was shaken, went to the kitchen, made a cup of coffee, and buried his face in his hands, praying, “*Lord, I’m down here trying to do what’s right . . . but must confess . . . I’m losing my courage.*” Then, King heard an inner voice saying, “*Martin Luther, stand up for truth. Stand up for justice. Stand up for righteousness.*”³

In moments of indecision and uncertainty, great and small, most of us have

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In moments of indecision and uncertainty, great and small, most of us have

experienced the “little voice in our heads” telling us what to do. Sometimes the voice is heard prospectively and sometimes retrospectively (“I should not have said or done that”). While not all “little voices” are epiphanies, distinguishing between them can be difficult. The latter do not necessarily begin with “Hello, this is God; can we talk?”

There are probably a number of us who cannot clearly recall having a genuine epiphany. Maybe we haven’t been confronted with dire, life-threatening moments. Maybe we just weren’t listening carefully. Or maybe, the Lord is waiting for the perfect moment to reveal himself to us. Our task then is simply to follow Philip’s admonition to Nathaniel, “Come and see.”

Prayer

Quiet us, Lord, amidst the noise of our fears, our uncertainties, our divisiveness and our prejudices, and let us hear the voice of your Son telling us to follow him. Amen.

1. John 1:43-51
2. Jan Schnell Rippentrop, *Commentary on John 1:43-51, WORKING PREACHER, Luther Seminary, Chicago IL, January 14, 2018*
3. Martin Luther King, Jr., *STRIDE TOWARD FREEDOM: THE MONTGOMERY STORY, Harper Brothers, 1958*

Postscript: Very often, we can see Jesus Christ in the face of those among us who suffer, who are oppressed or worse maybe, who are ignored altogether. We all need social interaction and affirmation of our humanity. Seafarers International House invites you to connect with seafarers and detained immigrants. You can bake cookies for seafarers and you can visit detained asylum seekers. They’re good, hardworking people, no matter what you have heard to the contrary from our political leaders. They are generally not American, but remember, America is an idea, not a race. Log onto www.sihnyc.org for more information.

Seafarers International House is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants. We offer pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It’s available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”

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