



“SARCASM”
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John 1:43-51

It’s an interesting passage of scripture, this Gospel John. It starts out kind of off the wall speaking about things that happened before all time. It starts out with Jesus being called something else – Logos, the word in Greek. John starts talking about Jesus being with God from the very beginning before there was ever even particulate matter from outer space. I don’t know if you saw that on the news this morning but they have received back a sampling of stardust. It touched down yesterday. So they are all excited about how galaxies start.

Well before all of that John says Jesus was. He moves on and he talks about this fellow who came proclaiming him, John the Baptist, and the role that he played in the great scheme of God’s plan of salvation for all humanity. There’s a mention of Jesus and John and John’s words, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord.” Now it goes on and on where John introduces a couple of his own disciples to Jesus and Jesus amazes them, quite frankly, Andrew, Peter totally amazed, but Jesus doesn’t stop with those calls. He’s moves on, goes back up to Galilee, home if you will, and he comes across this other fellow named Philip who was also from the same hometown as Andrew and Peter and Jesus calls Philip to come and follow, follow me, and Philip is amazed and it doesn’t take much of a Biblical scholar for those folks in that generation in that time to know their Sunday School, if you will, to know their faith well enough to say, “This guy could be Him” because see they were looking for Him. Everybody was looking for Him. They knew “Him” was coming -The Messiah. Why it was written throughout scripture, prophesied from days gone by of how Israel will once again live. The Hebrew people will once again be in the covenant and be strong and be mighty and full of grace and truth because the Messiah had come.

Philip knew his school. Philip knew his faith. He knew his scriptures. Philip runs into Nathanael another friend and he says, “I think we found Him.” Literally he says, we have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth son of Joseph from Nazareth so there would be no confusion. And Nathanael - gosh is this typical! We do this today, don’t we? Nathanael says, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Or maybe more appropriately, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nathanael doesn’t see him. He doesn’t see Jesus fulfilling this prophecy the way Philip does, the way Andrew did. Nathanael, well he may just be living out a hometown rivalry. He’s from Bethsaida, too, you know. And Nathanael is there and he is thinking of Nazareth, that’s that dinky little town just up river. There’s not much there. Can anything good come out of there? Ironically Nathanael’s words will be the first ones spoken that will fulfill John’s prophecy in chapter 1, verses 10 and 11. Do you remember that? He came to his own and his own people did not accept him. That’s not going to be the last time that will happen either.

But ironically Jesus doesn’t let that get to him and Philip doesn’t let it get to him either. Philip says, “Well, just come and see. Come on let’s go see, I’ll prove it to you. Come and see.” And Philip and Nathanael go to meet Jesus and there is Jesus and before they even get to each other, but just about when they are in ear shot Jesus says, “Now I tell you folks, here this is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Now I don’t think Jesus was brownnosing. Okay, I don’t think that was what was going on and I know that because John has Jesus use words that are peculiar, different. First of all he calls him Israelite, not a Jew. You have to know that in John’s language to be called a Jew, well it wasn’t the nicest compliment you could pay, because according to John, the Jews

referred not to those people who were Hebrew, but to those people who were really against Jesus, those leaders in the Synagogue and in the Temple, the leaders of the Hebrew religious hierarchy who really wanted to reject any kind of changes to what was going on because status quo meant they were there for the long haul. Change wasn't good. So when John calls folks the Jews and refers to folks in the scriptures as the Jews, please don't think that he's just talking about their Hebrew heritage. That's not a great name in John's Gospel, but when he uses the word, here is an Israelite, know that that is the greatest word of esteem that he could pay to anyone who is Hebrew. Jesus is complimenting this man Nathanael before Nathanael even knows him. Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

Have you ever had somebody come up to you and tell you something about yourself that you didn't know or that you didn't think that they knew. It's kind of fun and kind of spooky at the same time. It's shocking. At times we have folks that will come up and tell us something about ourselves that we didn't even know and you're going like all right, now how do you know that. Have you been talking to my great aunt Sadie? It's amazing to hear that that happens and when it does happen it takes us aback. Nathanael is taken aback. Who told you about me? How'd you come to hear about me? Who are you? We get the suspicion going don't we when we find ourselves confronted with someone who knows something about us and you are thinking, now wait a minute now, have you been on line? Have you been checking out my background, my past? Have you been doing things behind my back without my consent? Who are you? Jesus said, "Well, where did I come to find out about you? I saw you. You were sitting under the fig tree there long before Philip ever came to call you." Jesus has this wonderful knack of being able to see us clearly even when we don't know that we are being viewed or watched or observed. I saw you under the fig tree long before Philip called you.

It's reminiscent, isn't it, if you go back in your scripture in your Old Testament you can go back and find passages like that, God speaking to the prophets. He spoke to Isaiah that way – "I knew you before you were born." He spoke to Jeremiah that way, too, "in the womb, I called you by name, you were mine and I've appointed you a prophet to the nations." It's scary to think that God knows us even before we know God. That's called prevenient grace, by the way. Its God's grace that comes to us before we even know God exists, while we're still worrying about stardust. God is out calling us by name and he knows us intimately. Now some folks might get freaked out by that. I don't want God to know me that well. Tough, God already does. But there's a difference, you know, we get scared when we find people who know us too well, who know our credit scores, who know our shoe sizes, our dress sizes, our diets, our habits, who know where we live and how we live and what we bought and what we read and we can get freaked out by that really easy because that kind of hits a little close to home. So the temptation is to not let anybody get too close. To think of ourselves as somehow surrounded and protected. Sometimes we take that to an extreme and we get to thinking maybe we are just a little bit different than anyone else and as we are different from anyone else maybe we're a little bit better than anyone else or at least better than certain folks. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? But through all they hype and pretense of that, Jesus sees clearly through and says I saw you under the fig tree. I knew you before you were called.

The irony of all of this, did you ever have a friend, a really good friend who knows all your faults and foibles and loves you anyway? Probably because they don't love you because of your faults and foibles because it makes them feel better, they love you anyway because they see something in you that maybe you're not really willing to let everybody else see. Jan's back there smiling. She knows my faults and foibles. Thank goodness she loves me anyway. Amen! She's supposed to say Amen. But there's something holy about someone who loves you in spite of because they can see the best that you can become.

Truly here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. How'd you know about me? I knew about you before Philip called you. I saw you under the fig tree. Now let's don't go into the details, well Jesus happened to be walking by a fig tree and saw a guy leaning up against it and said I wonder who that is. No, no, don't go there. Don't try to short-circuit this. This is something that's pretty profound. We've seen it elsewhere in the Gospels, too, when Jesus meets the lady by the well. Remember her? She's the one coming at the wrong time of day to get water and there is a reason for that. She has a heritage, she has a history and it's not a good one. She had been married five times and she is living with somebody else now and Jesus knows that about her and tells her and he does it in such a way that he doesn't condemn her. Jesus has that ability and it's scary to think that there is someone out there who actually sees us as we are and truly identifies the potential in us and calls us to that potential.

While Nathanael was the first one to reject Jesus, he is also the very first one to call him who he really is. Truly you are the Son of God. It's a turnabout that profound. Nathanael says stuff about Jesus in his proclamation of faith that Philip didn't even say. Philip was just talking about well this I think this is the guy that Moses and the prophets were writing about. No, you are the Son of God. And Jesus says, "You're going to see greater things than this."

The last couple weeks we've been talking about revelation. That's exactly what this is all about. This is about revelation again. Its God revealing God's self to us in profound and peculiar ways. Jesus says to Nathanael, "The heavens will be torn apart and you'll see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

When we come to faith, what brings us to faith is not necessarily always our shame and our disgrace, the sin and sinfulness that plague us. Sometimes we come to faith because God comes to us and God looks past that and says, "I see in you what you can be." And it makes us want to reach toward that, not to feel judged but to feel blest. The hardest part for us today is to think and to feel and to believe in the best that we can all be because the world doesn't operate that way. The world looks at us and says, I sure am glad that I didn't make that mistake. But when we as the body of Christ redeem each other, we redeem each other with the same redemption that God had for us in Jesus Christ. In the power of the Holy Spirit we can see the potential in each other and we prod each other along in that. Because it's too easy for us to fall back on the tactic of the world and the tactic of the world is very simple, it's sarcasm. Can anything good come out of St. Andrew's? Can anything good come out of San Antonio? Can anything good come out of the Methodist Church? Can anything good come out of you? That's what the world says. Hear what God says, I see in you great potential. This isn't fortune cookie theology. This is God saying, I knew you before you knew me, before anyone called you and I know you and I love you and I can see in you the very best. Come and follow me. Come and follow.

It's too easy to be sarcastic. It's too easy to doubt and to be pessimistic. It's too easy. God calls to us in the greatest that there is within us that God put there and respond in faith. Just like Jan said in her children's time, what's our response to that? To believe. And Nathanael believed and made an acclamation, a proclamation of faith, a profession of faith, "You are the Son of God." When we live in that faith, sarcasm doesn't mean a thing. Can anything good come out of St. Andrew's, come and see, come and see, come and follow the one who sees the best in us. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!