

KNOWN, CHOSEN, AND LOVED

January 21, 2024

Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford

I remember the day about 11 years ago that I got a call from the bishop. I was sitting with my colleague in the local Panera and I looked at my phone and saw the name Bishop Sally Dyck. I said to Seamus, "it's the bishop" and I took my phone outside to answer it. Cryptically, she told me she would like to meet with me and so we set a date and location. When we met at the Starbucks down Randall near I-90, she came right out with her concern and said, "well I'm just going to jump right in and tell you – "I want you to be the Rockford District superintendent." Me, being, well me, said rather directly and bluntly: "Why? You don't even know me."

And it was true. I think we had said hello to one another once, kind of the head nod type of hello in which you acknowledge each other's existence.

And she began to tell me how she had come to know me without even meeting me (said something about my file...and I was thinking, "my file..there's a file on me?" And then she told me the conclusions she had come to about me from her research. And then she said, "that is why I think you would serve this district well as a superintendent"

I was a bit shell-shocked of course and had not a few emotions about the whole thing. One of which, was that feel-good emotion about being noticed and appreciated.

So I think I know how Nathanael in today's story may have felt. It's near the beginning of John's Gospel when Jesus is beginning his ministry and calling his disciples. Let's listen:

John 1:43-51

⁴³ 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 truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

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^[a] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you,^[b] you^[c] will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'^[d] the Son of Man."

~~~~~

I love this story for the exchange that Jesus and Nathanael have and what it teaches us in our own relationship with Jesus.

Known for who we are.....

I think we live in a strange time:

Putting all kinds of information about ourselves out on social media and yet worrying that our privacy is being violated. (I get that way when I mention something and then my phone starts showing me ads about what I've mentioned.....)

In the story, Jesus declares something about Nathanael: "Here in a true Israelite in which there is no deceit". Jesus is referring to the type of person Israel is meant to be and he is referencing Israel/Jacob who God continued the covenant with. Israel/Jacob whose 12 sons created the 12 tribes of the future nation of Israel. That Israel/Jacob operated with a bit of deceit in his relationships with his brother, father, and father-in-law. Nathanael must not have been like his ancestor. So Jesus said, "here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

I wonder if Nathanael worried at first about Jesus having overheard what he just said about Nazareth...."can anything good come out of Nazareth?" it's a judgment question revealing Nathanael's bias about Nazareth as a little backwater town that never really measured up to the neighboring towns in Galilee.

So Nathanael asks Jesus - like I asked the bishop, "how do you know me?"

And Jesus said to him, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Jesus doesn't reference Nathanael's off-hand, somewhat judgmental comment but rather mentions something else that perhaps only he and Jesus knew.

Jesus shows that he truly has seen and known Nathanael.  
And that touches Nathanael's heart.

Chosen because of who we are and despite who we are....

When we read and hear today's psalm we just might have mixed reactions.

The psalmist writes about how deeply known we are.....how we live our lives:

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit and when I rise;

<sup>3</sup>You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

But even more than what we do, the psalmist proclaims how God knows our minds and hearts.

you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>4</sup>Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.

And that could leave us feeling exposed and worried – because some of what God has seen is perhaps not so pretty.

Judgmental attitudes, greed, selfishness, lust and so forth

But thing is, we cannot truly relax and have peace if we don't accept that Jesus' forgiveness covers all those things that we wish would remain hidden; even hidden from ourselves.

Because of God's forgiveness of us, God can continue to choose us.

Loved....invested in

I said yes to the bishop

Not because I was excited about moving and doing the job of superintendent

But because her call to me was very personal

It was not a generalized call of "well, I needed someone and you're as good as anyone else"

The same with Nathanael. His was not a generalized call....

It was specific to him.

And the same is true with each of you.

Jesus knows and sees you completely

He has chosen to invite you into his circle and invest his eternal kingdom in you, like he did with Nathanael.

Jesus told Nathanael that he would see greater things than even being known – that he would see the very place where heaven and earth meet.

What Jesus says recalls ancestor Jacob who when he was running away from the results of his deceitfulness had a dream one night in which he saw a ladder between heaven and earth and angels ascending and descending. Jesus is telling Nathanael that in his faith journey with Jesus, Nathanael is going to experience a blessing.

And I believe this is what we need to remember.

We live in a time when the loss of the sacred is pretty profound: no day set aside anymore and the mystical has been replaced with proofs. Religious life has dwindled rapidly over the last couple of decades as we have watched church attendance decline and church closings rise. And we just might lose heart thinking we are serving a sinking ship.

But we're not!

Jesus is still choosing us to serve a kingdom that will not end....when everything else will end, the life Jesus brings to us will not. And there is a blessing to be experienced in following Jesus.

So may our response echo Nathanael's:

"You are the Son of God; You are the king of Israel"

You are the son of God; You are the king of Israel.

Let us pray:

Lord you know us completely and love us...such knowledge is too wonderful for us that we can hardly wrap our minds around it.

Lord, you have called us to play a part in a kingdom that is without bounds of time and space....such knowledge is too wonderful for us that we can hardly wrap our minds around it.

And our hearts proclaim: you truly are the son of God! Amen.