

Have you ever had someone take the wind out of your sails with a less-than-enthused reaction? You're excited about something; you have good news; you share it, and you get shut down with a negative comment. I wonder if that's how Philip felt. “We've located the Messiah...we know who he is”...and Nathanael's response is a classic bubble-burster: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Clearly, Nathanael thinks this is an absurd idea.

And right here is where Philip teaches us an incredible lesson. There were a number of ways he could've reacted to Nathanael's dismissive comment. He could've gotten angry and walked away. He could've said, “Forget it.” He could've engaged Nathanel in a theological debate, going point by point through the Scriptures. He could've done any of those things and more. But instead, he just says: “Come and see.” Just a simple invitation: ‘Come and see for yourself.’

There is a lesson here about sharing our faith that I don't want you to miss. So often I think Christians have the impression that we're supposed to “talk people into believing.” And normally, that makes us stop before we start. We don't know what to say or how to say it. We don't want to make anyone uncomfortable. Or it might just be the opposite—you love the truth so much that you're willing to just drop the hammer on anyone who disagrees with you. You've got answers and you know how to use them. Both extremes can learn a better way from Philip and his simple invitation: “Come and see.”

Now it must be said that this invitation was a bit more concrete on Philip's part. He could invite Nathanael to come see a flesh-and-blood person and listen to what that person had to say. But our invitation to come and see is really not that much different. Our invitation is this: Come and see Jesus in His Word and in His Church.

Making this invitation requires confidence. Philip had it in Jesus. He reasoned that if he could just get Nathanael and Jesus together, then the right things would happen. In this case, they did, and then some. Jesus exceeded Nathanael's expectations—so much so that the man who accepted the invitation to come and see ends up confessing Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel! That very day!

How did that happen? It happened when Nathanael allowed Jesus to speak to him. And when Jesus spoke to Nathanael, he did two things: Number One: He demonstrated that he knew Nathanael intimately; and number two: He gave Nathanael an amazing vision of hope. Intimate knowledge and a hopeful vision. That's what Jesus had for Nathanael and I'm suggesting that Jesus has the same for anyone who will dare to come into His presence.

When Jesus and Nathanael finally get together, Jesus starts talking about Nathanael's character and behavior and it is clear that Jesus has inside information about who Nathanael is, and it is so disarming that Nathanael is moved to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God and King of Israel! Whatever Jesus touched on in this exchange, it flipped the switch from “Can anything good

come from Nazareth” to “You are Son of God and King;” from skepticism to worship. This is really quite fascinating, and what it speaks to, I think, is something very fundamental.

Namely, if you are human, then you want to be known, and being known, you want to be loved. This desire drives us to do all sorts of things, too numerous to name. Some of those things can be quite noble and other things we might be ashamed of. We might not even be aware of how deep this drive to be known and loved goes—how thoroughly it controls our actions. It can also work in the negative—a fear of being unknown, or known and not loved, that fear can lead us away from connection into hiding. We build walls, reasoning that if I cannot be known, than I cannot be rejected. And all of this is often happening in a jumble in any given human heart and mind at once.

But here is the marvel of the Gospel. Jesus comes to Nathanael and He basically says, “I know you. I accept you, and I can promise you there are better days coming. I will show you greater things than you can possibly imagine.” Isn’t that something? At this precise moment in the history of your life, doesn’t that sound incredibly refreshing? The Son of God coming to you and saying to you, “I know you. I like you. I accept you. Let me tell you about the joy that is coming.” Is there anything we need more than that? I’m not sure what it would be.

But there’s one big hang-up. I want to be known and loved, but at the same time I know myself all too well. I know who I really am when no one is watching. I know how unlovable I am. If God knows everything about me, then how could he like me much less accept me? If those are the questions you’re having as well, then I invite you to come and see.

Come and see all the terrible things of which you are ashamed. Come and see Jesus stoop down to pick them up and carry them to the cross. Come and see those sins weigh Him down, as if they were His own; come and see Him punished in your place as He dies; come and see your darkest deeds buried in the tomb with Jesus. And there they stay. Come and see Jesus as He exits His tomb, fully alive, to make you fully alive, because there are now no sins that can be held against you. Justice has been done, the price for sin is paid in full, so Jesus can approach you with full acceptance. You are known and you are loved.

And now see the vision he holds before you. Jesus said to Nathanael, “You will see greater things than these. You will see heaven opened. You will see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Suddenly Jesus is talking about a deeper reality, the reality of heaven, the presence of Jesus as the man who is God, with his angels attending to Him. Jesus promises Nathanael, you will see this. This is your future. We are connected to each other now. You can look forward to this. This is an endless supply of hope and wonder. And if you believe that Jesus knows you and accepts you through his cross, you can have the hope and wonder of his crown. It is the deeper reality to which you are already connected. It is the bright beacon of hope calling you home. You see its light shining above all the things that trouble you; beyond your failures; beyond your health crises; beyond broken relationships; beyond pandemics; beyond civil unrest; beyond the darkness of death, Jesus says: “You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Your future: Heaven opened. Your present: full acceptance. Come and see Jesus.