



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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JANUARY 18, 2015
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Amazing What You Might Find I Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51

If you have not become addicted to the History Channel program *American Pickers*, you have likely spent some time watching life-long friends and business partners, Mike and Frank, hunt through other people's trash and treasure in search of their own unique finds. For people who love to save things, it is the ultimate affirmation show. Unlike the show *Hoarders* where some poor soul is trapped within mountains of useless stuff, *Pickers* proves that there are treasures to be found if we will but look for them. We would all love to climb into the attic or open that forgotten closet in the basement and discover a real treasure. When you are dealing with the unknown, you never know what you might find.

Take that premise back a couple of thousand years to a quiet village in the hills of Galilee known as Cana. Life was routine and little happened that was surprising. Folks went about their business, complained about the Roman soldiers who periodically came through town, and talked about their children, their work, and the weather.

If you were to go looking for something special, Cana is probably not where you would start. Jesus, however, was on the hunt, looking for individuals who might join him as he began to share the Gospel and forever change our understanding of God. He found a fellow named Philip who was from the village of Bethsaida where he had found Simon and Andrew. After Philip realized who Jesus was, he hurried to find his friend Nathaniel and share with him the astounding news that he had found the Messiah. When Nathaniel heard that this supposed emissary of God was from Nazareth, an even smaller village a little further south, he scoffed and asked whether anything good could come out of that poor mountain village—a rather unkind thing to say about any community. Philip's response was simply, "Come and see."

When Nathaniel and Philip arrived, Jesus knew he had found a treasure. He commented that Nathaniel was an authentic individual, a person in whom there was no guile, no deceit or pretense. Puzzled because he had never before seen this Nazarene and still skeptical about his origins,

Nathaniel asked Jesus how he knew him. "I saw you under the fig tree," Jesus answered. To us, that is about as odd an answer as you can get, but in that day, it meant something important. Rabbis and other serious students of scripture often took refuge under fig trees where they would be sheltered from the sun, gain some privacy, and spend uninterrupted time studying and meditating on scripture and God's dealings with his people. Nathaniel immediately knew that Jesus was someone who understood and appreciated his studies. He knew that he had found a treasure, the long-awaited Messiah of God. And Jesus, in a somewhat surprising way, told Nathaniel, if you think my noticing you and understanding something about you is astounding, just wait. You will be amazed at the things we experience together!

That message has not changed through the years. To each one of us who accepts the invitation to follow Jesus, the same promise is given: you will be amazed at what you find along the way. The calling of Christ is to look closely at the world, to pay attention to the people around us, to notice what is happening, and discern what needs to be done. The call of Christ is to hunt through the trash and treasures of this world and discover what is of true value.

Today we call out the people we have chosen to be our Deacons, women and men who will serve us in particular ways. One of the roles of a Deacon, however, is to remind the rest of us that each and every one of us is called to ministry. No Christian escapes that opportunity and responsibility. Our Deacons minister to us in special ways so that we will be reminded to find the ways in which we can minister.

As with Nathaniel, Jesus speaks to each of us and reminds us that we will be amazed at what we will find when we pay attention to what God is doing in the world, in our nation, in this community, in our church, and within each of us.

We have a calling to pay attention to the world. Without a doubt, we all feel that there is little we can do as individuals to effect change in the world, but awareness of the world's needs is the beginning of change. For instance, compassion and support for the people of France poured in from all parts of the world following the horrible attacks that took place in Paris a little over a week ago. But last week a Catholic Archbishop in Nigeria begged the world not to ignore the terror and bloodshed meted out by Boko Haram in his country. Last week somewhere between 150 and 2000 people were slaughtered while last year over ten thousand people were killed by this

bloodthirsty group.¹ Other atrocities occur daily throughout the world and we need to offer our prayers and support wherever hatred and greed steal life.

We have a calling to pay attention to our nation and what is happening among our fellow citizens. We have serious problems which need to be addressed, but let us not always belittle and mock the ones who first step forward with ideas. At least they are thinking and acting. Nathaniel made a snap judgment about Jesus before he had even met the man. He discovered he was wrong. As people of faith, let us listen to the things Jesus taught us about how to treat one another before we judge the ideas and opinions of other people. And let us act, not so much on our convictions, but on the teachings of Christ which stand for all time.

We have a calling to pay attention to our community, a place of diversity and challenge if there ever was one. Let us not forget that it is also a community rich in resources, chief of which is its people. Let us ask ourselves what Jesus would be doing if he were in Rocky Mount. Where would he spend his time? What changes would he want to see? Last week during the Turnage Speaker Series, we heard a wonderful challenge to change the way we think about our problems. Instead of lamenting the various causes of death in our community, we ought to focus on the many things that bring us life and then work to support and encourage those things. Jesus came, after all, that we might have life, full and complete (John 10:10). Nothing in all of scripture suggests that God intends death for us. From beginning to whatever the end might be, God's story is all about life.

We have a calling to pay attention to our congregation. What treasures exist among us? What is there of value at Lakeside that we need to promote? What exists here that we want other people to know? What gifts and talents are waiting to be discovered and who among us holds them?

In a previous congregation, I thought I was doing the right thing by inviting members of the congregation to help lead in worship, that is until I was informed that I should not have asked one particular individual to participate. My informant quickly added, however, that she was glad I had done so because the person deserved to be seen in a different light than how most people knew her. I watched that individual grow and flourish in faith because her gifts were finally allowed to be used. We are called to bring out the best in one another.

¹Carol Kuruvilla, "Nigerian Archbishop's Plea: Don't Forget About Boko Haram," *The Huffington Post* (January 17, 2015); available online at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/17/nigeria-archbishop-boko-h_n_6459354.html?utm_hp_ref=religion.

We have a calling to pay attention to ourselves. When Jesus looks for us, where does he find us? We do not all have to be reading scripture under a fig tree as Nathaniel was doing. But what does God “catch” us doing in life? What good qualities does God recognize in us? How does God call us to change our lives? What ministries does Jesus invite us to join? Within each of us there is treasure, something of value that God recognizes. What is it? What does God want to do with us? What amazing things are we going to see once we begin to look around?

Like Samuel in the stillness of the night or Nathaniel in the calm of an ordinary day, God in Christ is looking for us, seeking us out, paying attention to the amazing person we are. What are we looking for? What amazing things does God have in store for us? Listen and look at all God is doing in our world and in our lives. You will be amazed. Amen.

January 18, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

There are those nights when we cannot sleep that we sense a whisper calling our name. We rush to think about all that needs to be done at work or we fret over the projects that have not yet been completed for school. We run down our list of chores to be accomplished. We worry over children and grandchildren and friends in trouble. Our own demons call our name and tempt us to venture into shadowed alleys we know better than to visit. All of the demands and frustrations of our lives call for us, and we run to and fro trying to figure out which one needs us most.

It is only when we listen to our own hearts that we recognize your voice wooing us, O God. You call to us, not to make more demands or to agitate us or even to chastise us; rather, your whispers in the night are an invitation to listen, to watch, to pay attention to what you are doing in the world so that we might better follow your path and imitate your ways. We hear, O Lord, and invite you to speak.

Help us to hear the cries for help that abound around us. Enable us to respond with compassion and creativity, providing help as needed. Help each of us to learn our own gifts and to share them freely as prompted by your Spirit. Use us to bring healing to those who are ill, comfort to everyone who sorrows, insight to our friends who are confused, and strength to all who are weak. Allow us to open our own hearts where they have been closed before and to open our minds in support of the truth you bring to us.

Where our abilities are not sufficient to the need, bring someone who has what is required. Give us courage for every task before us and wisdom to discern where we are being called in intervene.

Call us all in the dark of night as well as in the light of day and teach us to recognize your voice so that our response is immediate. Here we are, Lord. Call us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.