

The Eyes to See as Jesus Sees 2 Epiphany B

It is very easy to judge by appearances. We all have fallen prey to thoughts that judge how people look, or how someone should keep house, or based perhaps where people have gone to school or the type of work they do. Many times people judge by stereotyping.

If I tell people that I was raised in NYC and Long Island there is at times a brief silence after I have spoken. Perhaps they don't know what to say or don't know much about New Yorkers. They wonder about the lack of the characteristic NY accent. They may surmise I am from an immigrant family, or perhaps as I've been told, a Jewish family.

The town of Nazareth projected a certain image in the minds of Palestinians then. It was mixed racially. Nathanael had it fixed in his mind that anyone coming from Nazareth was not to be trusted. How could Jesus choose people who demonstrate the same failings we observe in people in our daily lives? How could Jesus choose us?

Philip, Nathanael's friend, found that the good news of his new found faith was irresistible. His discovery of Jesus just had to be shared. Philip risked rejection when he made the decision to tell Nathanael. He risked being embarrassed. Today, in our setting, he would risk being accused of trying to force his religion on others, of being "evangelical" or even a fanatic.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "**Great minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Small minds discuss people.**" Philip's encounter with Jesus of Nazareth so filled his heart that he could find himself doing all the above. He compared Jesus as "the one whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." Excited as Philip was about Jesus the response of Nathanael would put the brakes on his enthusiasm. What Philip shared would be a struggle for Nathanael's small mind but large heart.

Aldous Huxley authored the book, *Brave New World*, required high school reading for many of us. The citizens of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* don't have to struggle with the questions of life because they are carefully medicated with soma. One excerpt of the book writes, "There's always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gram tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears - that's what soma is."

-Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 285.

Nathanael took a risk when he decided to go with his friend Philip. He threw his caution to the wind and opened his life to one of tears. And so Nathanael came "to

see"; and Jesus delved deep into his heart. "Here," said Jesus "is a genuine Israelite; a man in whose heart there is no guile." A genuine Israelite is an interesting observation. What made Nathanael the genuine article? What makes anyone a genuine person? The words "transparent, authentic and real" come to mind. What does it mean to be a genuine person?

The psalmist wrote, "LORD, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar."

Jesus saw in Nathanael a pure heart. The dictionary says that "guile" means "treachery, cunning or deceit." Despite his open prejudice toward Nazarenes, Nathanael was at the very least, an honest, simple man.

Nathanael was surprised that anyone could give a verdict like that with so short an acquaintance, and he demanded to know how Jesus could possibly understand him. Jesus told him that He had already seen him under the fig tree. To the Jews the fig tree always stood for peace. Their idea of peace was when one could be undisturbed under his own vine and his own fig tree (compare 1Kgs.4:25; Mic.4:4). Further, the fig tree was leafy and shady, and it was the custom to sit and meditate under the roof of its branches.

Jesus saw a person whose life was consistent with being called an Israelite, one of those who followed a single God revealed to Abraham. Under the fig tree Jesus saw Nathanael praying and in a state of heavenly peace. There under the tree, Jesus read his inner most thoughts. And Nathanael said to himself: "Here is the One who understands my dreams! Here is the One who knows my prayers! Here is the One who has seen into my most intimate and secret longings; longings that I have never even dared put into words! Here is the One who can translate the inarticulate sigh of my soul! This must be God's promised anointed One and no other." Nathanael came and he saw. The One who could read and understand and satisfy his heart was here at last.

It may be that Jesus smiled. He quoted the old story of Jacob at Bethel who had seen the golden ladder leading up to heaven (Gen.28:12-13). It was as if Jesus said: "Nathanael, I can do far more than read your heart. I can be for you and for all people the ladder that leads to heaven." Nathanael needed to change his thoughts about this man from Nazareth. He needed to view the Messiah in a different way.

At this time of year we remember a modern day prophet whose name was Martin Luther King. He too was an honest and simple man. He tried to help us see people in a different way. He saw that there were ways that people treated each other that were wrong. He had a dream of peace in a country torn by inequality. It is a dream still to be realized.

Who put that dream in Martin's heart? Who took him to the mountaintop to see what God intended? Everyone has had someone that mentored their dream, their faith, and their skills. For Nathanael it was Philip and later Jesus. It was that Jesus,

who on the day he met Nathanael ignored the prejudice and saw Nathanael's inner nature that broke the cycle of fear and misunderstanding. It was that Jesus that showed the world that the Messiah comes not from places of power but from positions of principle. Jesus was a man that could take people right where they were living, even those filled with resentment and hatred and move them to higher ground.

It was that Jesus, to whom we give thanks for raising up for us leaders of conviction, of promise, of fearless spirituality and courage. It is Jesus who holds the mirror up so we can see the image of our true self. It is that Jesus, who seeks genuine faith to leave the shade of the tree to work for His kingdom.

In the words of the great sculptor Michelangelo, who chipping away with his chisel at a huge shapeless piece of rock, was asked what he was doing, replied, "I am releasing the angel that is imprisoned in this marble."

God, help us. Help us to see the angel imprisoned in us all. God help us to see the angel in a child, in a teenager, in a young adult, that is begging to be released. And where we can not see its beauty for our blindness, give us eyes to see past appearances, hands to release abundant life though we think it can not grow, courage to keep chipping away at what we cannot see, and faith until the image of Christ and His will unites us like the waters of a river. May we be like a Philip, whose enthusiasm is undeterred for the joy of seeing a friend transformed into an angel. Let us pray.

Lord, give us eyes to see others as you do. Keep preconceived ideas or prejudice from seeing another clearly until we can understand what is in a person's heart. Make us bold in recognizing the beauty around us that we can not see. And prepare us for that day when our eyes see the heavens opened and You ascending and descending in your glory. AMEN