

If you could go back in time and witness any one event in world history, what would you like to see? There are plenty of great moments to choose from. You could head back and see one of the defining moments in our nation’s history, like the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the discovery of the New World. Or one of those great moments that took place on the world stage, like the Battle of Hastings or the posting of the 95 theses. You could see great sights, like maybe one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, or an actual live dinosaur.

But I’m talking to a room full of bible-believing Christians...so we know there are even greater things we could see. Wouldn’t it have been awesome to watch during the six days of Creation, as God called everything into existence with a word? Or how about the flood? Maybe that one we’d only like to see if we could do it from the safety of the ark with Noah. You could go back and watch as God sent the ten plagues or parted the Red Sea. Or, you could see one of Jesus’ miracles. Which would you pick?

It’s a fun question to ponder, it is. But ultimately, it’s kind of a moot point. Unless we have a time machine, we can’t go back to see any of those great things – and I don’t think God will let us invent one before Jesus comes back.

But what if I told you that, of all of those great things to see, one is even greater? Jesus is calling disciples to follow him in the gospel lesson this morning, and that’s what he promises them – that they’d get to see something even greater than his greatest miracles. What if I told you it’s something Jesus still shows to his followers today – and you don’t even need a time machine to see it? “Come and see,” Jesus invites us this morning. “Come and see the greatest thing you’ve ever seen.”

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 is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.”

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 because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” ⁵¹ He then added, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Jesus was just beginning his public ministry, and so some great things were about to start happening. John says he was about to head to Galilee. He had an appointment there – a

wedding in Cana to attend, where he’d perform his first miracle. And he wanted some people to come with him and witness it, so he’s calling disciples.

First, Andrew and John. They had been John the Baptist’s disciples, and when John pointed to Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” they left John and followed Jesus. Andrew went and told his brother Simon Peter, “We’ve found the Christ!” and so Peter followed, too.

Something similar happens when Jesus calls Philip. He was a hometown companion of Andrew and Simon, so they had probably filled him in on Jesus’ identity. But when Jesus says to him, “**Follow me,**” the first thing he does is heads to his friend Nathanael with the good news. “**We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.**”

This was the news Nathanael was longing to hear. He was, like Jesus said later, a **true Israelite** – in other words, a true believer in God’s promises about a Savior from sin. Philip says, “We’ve found him! He’s here!”

But then he tells him who he is: **Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph.** And you can almost hear the skepticism, disappointment, maybe even a little contempt in Nathanael’s answer: “**Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?**” The problem wasn’t that Nazareth had a bad reputation or anything. The problem for Nathanael was that Nazareth didn’t have a much of a reputation at all. It wasn’t a place God had said anything good would come from, much less the *greatest* good, the Savior. It wasn’t known for producing spiritual leaders. You’d expect the Savior to come from Judea, David’s land. You’d expect to find him in glorious Jerusalem, Israel’s capital. But Nazareth? There was nothing flashy about Nazareth. It was just an ordinary, unassuming village in Galilee.

It’s interesting, isn’t it? Nathanael almost missed out on seeing the greatest one who ever lived because...well...he seemed too normal. It wouldn’t be the last time that happened. Later, in Nazareth, Jesus preaches in the synagogue and tells them he’s the Savior God promised. And they say, “Wait...isn’t this the carpenter’s son?”

It still happens today. Jesus still comes in ordinary, humble ways. He comes through words on a page and spoken by people. He comes at the font, with a few words and some ordinary water poured on a head. He comes through words connected to pieces of bread and wine you can buy at the supermarket. And through such humble and ordinary means, he does great things! Gives his body and blood, and with it forgiveness. Washes away sin and gives eternal life, even to babies! Works and strengthens faith in him.

But because it’s all so humble and ordinary, it’s easy to miss. Think about that list of things we’d go back to see if we could. Isn’t it the miraculous, the flashy, the glorious? That’s what we want! If God is gonna come and do great things, that’s how it should be. But when Jesus comes and does his work through the means of grace, we don’t see any flashes of light. We might not even feel any different. And that can leave us with a dose of the skepticism, disappointment...even contempt of a Nathanael. Going through the motions as we come to the Lord’s house or the Lord’s table. Not making hearing his word a priority, because we don’t really think it will make much of a difference.

"Come and see," Philip said to Nathanael. "Come and see," and we'd do well to go with him. Because Jesus is about to show Nathanael he's not ordinary at all. Jesus wants to show Nathanael and you and me the greatest thing we've ever seen.

As Nathanael approached an ordinary looking man from little old Nazareth named Jesus, Jesus says, "**Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.**" And right away, Nathanael is taken aback. How does someone I've never met know what's in my heart? "**How do you know me?**" Nathanael asked. Jesus says, "**I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.**" We don't know what he was doing under the fig tree. Just finding shade from the summer sun? Seems like more. It wasn't uncommon for believing Jews to find quiet time during the day to pray or meditate on God's Word. Jesus says to him, "There, when it was just you and God...I saw you." Now Nathanael had seen something great. And the Spirit led him to believe it: **Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel**, he said.

But Nathanael still hadn't seen the greatest thing. Neither have we. God creating the world, or sending a flood, or parting the Red Sea...that's great. A Jesus who knows what's hidden in my heart, and sees what happens when no one else is around...that's great. But it's also terrifying. Because then he can see the sins that no one else can, too. He knows better than everyone else the skepticism, contempt, anger, self-righteousness, greed...all the reasons that heaven's door should be closed on me. Then he can see perfectly all the sins that separate me from a Holy God, and no flood or flashy miracle can take them away.

No, we needed something even greater. And that's what Jesus wants to show you. ⁵⁰ **Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."** ⁵¹ **He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."**

You might not catch the reference right away. But I bet Nathanael did. Jesus is bringing to mind something God showed a man named Jacob in a dream almost 2000 years earlier. It was something great. He saw God in heaven, and a stairway connecting heaven and earth, and angels of God going up and down that stairway. But that was just a vision, a picture; the reality Jesus was describing was far greater.

Jesus says he is that ladder. He had come to reconnect sinners to a Holy God. He had come to open heaven's door to us again. And Nathanael would get front row seats and see Jesus do that greatest of things.

Again, it would seem rather humble and ordinary. It wasn't the miracles Jesus performed; it was every ordinary moment of Jesus' humble life. But is it not the greatest thing you've ever seen? Because it was lived without sin, and it was all for you, to cover over all your sins and bridge the gap between you and God. It was the humility and shame of his suffering and death, nailed to a cross as a common criminal. But is it not the greatest thing you've ever seen? Because there he's the Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world. The sins that stood between you and God – he's paying for every last one. There heaven's door was slammed shut on him in your place as he suffered the hell you deserved. So there hell's door was slammed shut for you. There he flung wide heaven's door for you...for me...for all.

**Christ the Lord Lutheran
Epiphany 1
January 14th, 2018**

**Pastor Degner
John 1:43-51
“The Greatest Thing You’ve Ever Seen”**

Nathanael would get front row seats to Jesus saving him from his sins. And maybe that makes you feel underprivileged – like you’d need a time machine to see it, too. But Jesus gives you a front-row seat, too. He’s still showing you the greatest of things.

“Come and see,” he says at the font, as heaven opens wide and Jesus connects a baby to God through water and the word. “Come and see,” Jesus says in the supper, as he places into your mouth the body and blood given on the cross, and a foretaste of the heaven that still stands open for you. “Come and see,” Jesus says, as on page after page of your bibles he shows you the greatest thing you’ll ever see – God and you, reconciled.

And now, “Come and see,” is what you get to say. You noticed, didn’t you? Andrew tells his brother, Peter. Philip tells his friend, Nathanael. Because when you’ve seen the greatest thing there is to see, you can’t keep it to yourself! Say it to your friends and family and anyone who will listen: “Come and see the greatest thing you’ll ever see.” Amen.