



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

January 18, 2009

## 2 Epiphany 2009

Today we read a story that we only find in the gospel of John. It's a story about a lesser known apostle called Phillip who goes and fetches an even lesser known person called Nathaniel to see Jesus. When Nathaniel heard that Jesus was from a two bit village called Nazareth he asked Phillip if anything good could come from Nazareth. Phillip said come and see. Then When Jesus sees Nathaniel coming towards him he says the most extraordinary thing He says here is a man in whom there is no guile. There is no deceit. There is no cunning. What Jesus saw then in Nathaniel was a person of sincerity, a person of honesty and a person of truth,

It may have been that Nathaniel was a rabbi because rabbis used to spend time under fig or olive tress studying and teaching and Jesus said he saw Nathaniel under the fig tree. And this Rabbi Nathaniel who was full of truth and honesty and sincerity acknowledges Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus then says to this man of honesty and sincerity and truth. This is only the beginning. You will see greater things because of me. In me you will see heaven on earth and you will see what heaven on earth is supposed to be like. You will see what the kingdom of God is supposed to be like. You will see God in his power and glory working in and among and through his people. You will see the truth of God in me.

In the gospel of John Jesus goes on to begin many statements with In truth I tell you. Or Truly Truly I say to you. Jesus goes on to claim that he is the way the truth and the life. Ironically When Jesus has been condemned to die Pilate asks him what is truth when the real truth is standing right in

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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front of him.

And Jesus was standing there condemned to die because he had made the truth of God known and it was not what people had wanted to hear.

When Jesus called Matthew to be his apostle it was outside of the truth that the religious people believed about God. Tax collectors were the enemy. They were the untouchables who stole money under the guise of the law.

Jesus stretched the understanding of the truth to say in a powerful way he may be a tax collector but he is still a child of God.

When the woman was caught in adultery it was a great opportunity to trick Jesus and put him on the spot about the truth of God. If he says stone her he simply allows the status quo. If he says don't stone her he commits religious treason. And Jesus says you who is without sin cast the first stone.

Yes she has sinned but the sin does not warrant vengeance. It does not warrant death. It does not warrant being excluded from the community of faith because she like all of us is guilty of a sin.

The common order for the day if anybody did anything wrong was revenge. You know an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth. That sort of good stuff. Jesus said no, lets not do that any more. The truth of God is not an eye for an eye. It is not vengeance. What I say is love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Think about your actions and your words.

You see I believe that Nathaniel who is honest and truthful and sincere in his religious duties found himself to be challenged by what he believed to be the truth about God.

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And I believe that we too must always be challenged about we believe to be the truths about God. We all consider ourselves to be honest, sincere, truthful without guile or deceit. But if in any of this we have judgment or vengeance or exclusion for anybody then we do not understand the truth of God.

There were 2 Zen Priests on a journey and they came to river. At their side of the river was a woman who was unable to cross the river. The younger Zen Priest picked up the woman and carried her safely to the other side. When he put her down she thanked him and they all went on their way. A little further down the road the older priest said one of our great commandments is that we are not allowed to touch women yet you picked up that woman and carried her across the river.

For the next 2 miles, as they walked, the older priest constantly reminded the younger one of his misdoing and his breaking of the law.

The younger priest then stopped and said to the older one. You know something I put that lady down at the river. Yet you are still carrying her.

The truth of God is blinded to us when we carry resentments and vengeances and judgments on and against other people. Jesus stretched Nathaniel's understanding as he did every person he came into contact.

We are no different.

So what is it that we are carrying and should have left at the river?

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