

"Come and See"
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I ran. I fled. I sprinted with all my might on that dark, starry night, along that beach in Ecuador. I ran until my feet burned in the sand, and then I ran some more. I ran until the lights far in the distance blurred in my teary eyes, and then I ran some more. I ran until my legs jellied underneath my weight and my arms hung like heavy sacks, flopping and dangling at my sides. Finally my knees buckled and I turned to face the ocean, the crashing waves and the deep dark void of the Pacific. My whole torso slumped in the weight of defeat. I had fled as far as I could. With little strength in what remained, I cried out to the deep, "I can't do this! ... I can't learn this language! I can't be myself with these people! I can't be here anymore! I can't ... I can't do this." It was the end of the line. I had let go of the rope. There was nothing left.

I was in dire circumstances. Yet we know everything must turn out OK, for here I am today, telling you this story. We desperately want to know what happens – What good come from this? – and yet we also know there is little risk. I am here after all, and this story is about me, not you.

And so it is when we read books, watch TV and go to movies. We enter into a story where usually things go wrong in the beginning, and we ask "What good can ever come of this?" And then we see how it turns out. But just to add to the safety level, we first read all the reviews and talk to friends to make sure the ending is good, the time well spent, lest we waste our time on an outcome not pleasing to us or, heaven forbid, we are bored!

So when we turn on the news, and we see events occurring across the world, we wonder...

In a time of increased racial and religious tension, What good can come from Birmingham?

In a time of intense political division, What good can come from Washington?

And perhaps even here, with newly enacted development plans and a church that has seen so much change over the past two years, many may ask:

What good can come from Princeville?

If only life were so easy! If only we could sit on the sidelines and wait to see how turn things out, wait and see what good will come, wait and see...

This is where today's scripture challenges us.

Jesus is just beginning his ministry. Some wild prophet in the wilderness named John the Baptist is dunking people in rivers and calling Jesus the Lamb of God. A few fishermen have begun to follow him. He arrives in Galilee, a small fishing village on

the edge of a lake. One follower, Philip, decides to invite a friend, Nathaniel. Philip bolsters his case, saying this is the one whom Moses and all the prophets wrote about, the Messiah, the anointed one. His name is Jesus, from Joshua meaning one who saves, and his father is Joseph, from the line of David. Oh, and by the way, he grew up in Nazareth."

Nazareth! Nazareth?? You can almost here Nathaniel's doubt dripping from his question: "Can anything good come from there?"

There is a tension in the question, Can anything good come from there?

There is the doubt, the feeling that whatever this guy's name is and whoever is his father and whatever he is saying or doing, he is from Nazareth, nothing good has come from Nazareth so end of story.

And yet a story remains to be told, perhaps the Greatest Story Ever Told.

There is also another tension in the question. While perhaps doubtful, Nathaniel is perhaps not being negative. There is something I like to call positive doubt. The kind of doubt that searches for the good, that doesn't give up on the negative, but also does not cling to the good as one sees it. Nathaniel is openly asking what good is there. He isn't condemning Jesus or saying it's all bad. He doesn't say what's good FOR ME. He simply asks Can anything good come from there? And that leaves the door open to a deeper, broader meaning - Can anything good FOR THE WORLD come from there? Can anything good FOR ALL PEOPLE come from Nazareth?

In this sense, Doubt is the flip side of faith.

We must be honest with our doubts if we are to be true in our belief. Honest doubt is the seed of honest faith.

We need people like Nathaniel asking very real questions.

At this point, Philip could have taken offense to Nathaniel's question. He could have dismissed Nathaniel's doubt as unbelief and not worthy of his time. He could have bolstered his case even more, debating the meaning of Hebrew scriptures with his pal. But Philip simply repeats the words Jesus had said in response to the questions of his first followers: Come and see.

Come and see. And stark contrast to our culture's: Wait and See. Come and See.

We need people who will ask the tough questions, who are searching for the good and do not see it yet. And we need people who are inviting those questioners in, to come and see for themselves what good is coming.

And not only to come and see, but to be a part of this good, to be a part of this movement that rocks the very foundation of the world and breaks forth in transformative healing love.

What good can come from Nazareth?

Come
And
See

In this process of coming and seeing and participating in the movement,

We Must learn / earn trust of each other - Ps 139

We must have Face-To-Face Encounters. Encounters of the Third Kind. No, not extraterrestrial. But ones where the Holy Spirit is involved. What many First Nations people call seeing with our third eye.

So there I was, facing the terrible blackness and the pounding waves, threatening to pulverize my tired soul, my wearied body. My confession hung in the air, the words "I can't" swallowed up by the night. And then the sound of the crashing waves and the sensation of the pebbles digging into my knees began to fade, and in the stillness a voice spoke directly to (in?) my heart. "You're right, Evans - you can't." [Pause] "But I can." I had condemned myself to "I can't," and the Lord of the Universe answered in sovereign grace: "But I can." My chest melted as God's love poured into my heart. My parched soul drunk heartily from this restored spring of life.

We need the Presence of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Jesus. We can't do this alone.

We need many perspectives, many questions, many invitations.

Let us not give up on this place.

Let us not give up on each other.

Let us not give up on God.

Come and See what good can come of this.

Amen.