

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Gospel, Year B

NO MORE WAITING

John 1:43-51

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

43The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 46Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

DIAGNOSIS: Giving a Fig about Little Things

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Looking to be Impressed

Nathanael doesn't seem too impressed with Jesus' credentials: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" he asks (v. 46). It's only when Jesus turns his attention to Nathanael that Nathanael is willing to give Jesus a fair shake. It's so post-Christian of

him to not be impressed by Jesus. And so human of him to pay attention to Jesus only because Jesus is focused on him. A little minor recognition from Jesus, “I saw you under the fig tree ...,” and Nathanael is all in.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Waiting on a Miracle

We may have to question Nathanael’s shallow judgment though. That’s all it takes? Jesus recognizes Nathanael from under the fig tree, and that’s how Jesus grabs the man’s heart? That’s hardly worthy of being called a miracle. But Nathanael reacts as if it is—lauding Jesus as more than a Rabbi: calling him Son of God, and King of Israel. Even Jesus indicates that Nathanael has overreacted.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Misdirected

Nathanael seems to have found the right man (Jesus is Son of God, and King of Israel), but Nathanael appreciates him for the wrong reasons. Hmm. Sounds like us, too: We’re so impressed with the little miracles—but we will see greater things than these. It’s the life-and-death stuff about Jesus that really matters.

PROGNOSIS: Giving a Fig about Big Things

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Mystery Revealed

Nathanael being known by Jesus in their first encounter is notable. But having Jesus suffer and die for him is quite another. The Jesus whom Nathanael will get to know is the Son of Man who will be more concerned to commend his mother and beloved disciple into each other’s care, than he is about his own impending death (20:26-27). Nathanael will see greater things, like Jesus putting others’ lives before himself. Jesus will be the King of Israel (“King of the Jews” in 20:19) who puts the salvation of Nathanael, and Mary, and John, and you and me, ahead of his own life. He will be the Son of God and King worth

being impressed by, because Jesus truly gives a fig.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Being Known

Stretching his arms out in suffering and death, Jesus opens heaven to all (v. 51), and that includes Nathanael and us. He knows us—not just how to impress us, but truly knows our deepest need (forgiveness, life, and salvation). And, as with Nathanael's first impression, it is good to be known by him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Greater Things

But the crowning glory of Jesus is that he gives a fig for all humanity, and inspires us to do the same. So we stop waiting around to be impressed by the next miraculous encounter with Jesus. Instead, we go out with the good news that God has come down in the "Son of Man" (v. 51). God wants us to trust, that in Jesus, we are known by God. And, knowing we are known, we can turn our attention to giving a fig for the world God loves.