

I Saw You

2afterEpiphany

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 1:43-51

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of the scariest things in this life is not knowing what's about to happen. Alfred Hitchcock, a renowned horror movie director, is quoted as saying, "There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it." Hitchcock was known for the suspense in his movies. You never knew when something bad was going to happen. Sometimes you knew it was going to happen, but you had to wait, and wait, and wait, building the tension in your bodies, before it would happen.

Some of the best scary movies today do the same thing. They make you wait, not knowing when the bad thing will happen, and building the tension before it does.

In the mid-nineties, there was a movie called "Congo," based on the novel written by Michael Crichton—the same author who wrote "Jurassic Park." About midway through the film, there is a particularly tension-raising scene in which a character deciphers some hieroglyphics in a temple a group and he have found. The character delivers the message after an attack or two has already happened, but what he says makes it that much worse. He says the hieroglyphics read "We are watching you."

In the movie, the creatures which are attacking the human characters have already been shown to be intelligent. There is no doubt that these creatures could be watching them, waiting for the prime opportunity to attack. "We are watching you." If you've seen and remember the movie, perhaps that quote reminds you of the tension you felt when you watched it.

In our Gospel text this morning, Jesus says something similar. He tells Nathanael, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Some of you might be thinking, yes, but this is Jesus, not some creatures in some film. Let's explore the ramifications of Jesus' words as we look back at our Gospel text.

Verse 1

John the apostle begins our text writing: "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'"

Just looking at those two sentences, we can see that John is saying several things about Jesus. First, Jesus *decided* to go to Galilee. It wasn't a whim. It wasn't that Jesus had no idea what He was doing; He knew exactly what He was doing. He was—and continues to be—an intelligent being. He knew where Philip would be and He went with the purpose of calling him to follow Him. He was the manifestation of God in human flesh. Yet God humbled Himself to learn and do things as any human being would. As it says in the writings of the prophet Isaiah: "he had no form or majesty that we should desire him." And again in the Gospel of Luke: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." Jesus was God in human flesh, yet He was no celebrity or model, no Einstein or great thinker. But He did have intelligence, and He used it here to go find Philip.

Today Jesus continues to seek those to follow Him. He calls them through the Word—whether it is heard here in church, it was heard in church years ago and was remembered by the Holy Spirit, or in the encouragement of brothers and sisters in Christ. That is how we have two great events this morning: the baptism of Kora and the confirmation and entrance to adult membership of Cody.

Now that Kora has been baptized, and once Cody has been confirmed, though, it doesn't end there. In the last chapters of some of the Gospels, Jesus has died and the disciples go to hide in the upper room—and even once He has breathed the Holy Spirit on them to be His messengers, they go back to their everyday routines. Granted, Baptism and adult membership are not the same as calls to be apostles—Kora and Cody are not being called to do miracles and travel as preachers to the ends of the earth. (They may be later, but if they are, it will be by a different means than Baptism and membership.) At the same time, they are called to do their everyday routines, but as new people. In baptism, they are both made new creations in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and they are called to continue hearing the Word. It is only through hearing God's Word that they will continue to grow in the faith and in love toward others. They are not called to be apostles, and neither are we—but we are all called to love God, His Word, and our neighbors, and the only place we learn to do these things is in the Word, and the Spirit working in us through that Word. Kora, Cody, and we are all new creations in Christ Jesus, and as new creations, we desire to continue hearing the Word and loving our God and our neighbors, just as Philip would demonstrate his love for Nathanael in our next verses.

Verse 2

Once Jesus had called Philip, “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’”

Again we hear that Jesus was not born as or live as a celebrity or earthly king. He was from Nazareth—a city which Nathanael doubted could hold such a person as the promised Messiah. To this, Philip simply replied, “‘Come and see.’” Even though he had his doubts, Nathanael went with Philip. “Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael said to him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered him, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’”

Just as He did not take an appearance to be noticed, most of the time Jesus would not use His divine power, but here we have a case where He did, using His ability to see all—His omniscience.

To the sinful human being, the fact that God is omniscient is the most terrifying concept ever. God sees him or her all the time. Not just out in public. Not just among family. All the time. Even when that sinner is what she or he believes is quote-unquote “all alone.” And God has the power to condemn that sinner—indeed, any of us—to hell. Forever. Forget the creatures from “Congo” and the hieroglyphics from the Temple of Solomon reading “We are watching you”—*God* is watching you! *That* is a much scarier thought. At any time, God could come and say, “I saw you.”

But as we heard earlier, God sought us out. He sought you out. He called you to Himself through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism. He did this not because you are perfect or because you're not a sinner—you are. No, He did it because He is love. He is love so He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay for your sins. Even though Jesus didn't always use His Godly, divine power, He was still God in the flesh. As such, when He would later be nailed to the cross and crucified, He would be separated from God the Father, suffering hell itself, for you, for your sins, so that you would not have to suffer the punishment you've rightly deserved—the punishment you and God both know you would have had coming to you for those times God saw you sinning.

Verse 3

Because God sent His Son Jesus to die for your sins, He has sought you through His Word. Now that you have heard it, you will see greater things than these, just like Nathanael. “Jesus answered (Nathanael),

‘Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree,” do you believe? You will see greater things than these’ ... ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

Philip, Nathanael, and all of the apostles did not deserve for Jesus to call them to follow Him. Nevertheless they would go on to see the blind made to see, the lepers to have their skin healed, and many brought to faith in God through Jesus. They also had their trials and suffering—but that was for the sake of Jesus. Tradition holds that eleven of these twelve likely died in faith and would go on to see God and Jesus in the glories of heaven.

Today, we have been called to be believers. We may not do miracles, but we still see them as people are brought to the water of Baptism, as those who have grown up in the church or who have brought back to the church are confirmed in the faith. We may not have been called out of our everyday lives, but we have been sent back to them as new creations, ones which can love our families, neighbors, friends, coworkers, and everyone we meet as God Himself loved us. “We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).”

Our time here on earth has not yet been completed; so we do as the apostles did: keeping with Jesus and His Word. The new creations we have been made know that that is the only place we can be kept in the faith and learn to truly love God and our neighbors. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

And yes, God is still watching you—He is still watching us. But in the forgiveness of His Son Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, God no longer sees your sin, but you as His dear child. This He does for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, God manifested in human flesh. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.