

THE SON OF GOD

Genesis 28:10-22

John 1:35-51

“Behold the Lamb of God!” When two of John’s disciples heard John the Baptist say these words, they turned and followed Jesus who showed them where he lived. And they continued to abide with Jesus.

One of these two disciples was Andrew. We do not know who the other one was. Andrew tells his brother, Simon, that he has met the Messiah, the Anointed One. When Jesus saw Simon, he declared that he would be called Cephas (Arabic for the Rock; Greek = Petra = Peter). It is a slightly different setting than in Matthew 16 where Jesus declared Simon the Rock and upon him the church would be built.

In the next paragraph Philip went and told his brother, Nathanael, that they have found the Messiah and that it is Jesus from Nazareth. Nathanael, evidently a person who says what he thinks remarked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nazareth was a small, insignificant town in Galilee; a town that basically sat near, or on a cliff. It did not make sense to the scholars of that day that the Messiah would come from such a place. Some even refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, because he came from Nazareth. They all believed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as predicted by the prophet, Micah!

Philip told Nathanael, “Come and see for yourself.” When Nathanael approached Jesus, Jesus remarked, “Behold an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Interesting remark – an Israelite with no deceit. Did Jesus intend to make what we would hear as an anti-Semitic comment? That doesn’t make sense, since Jesus, himself, was an Israelite according to the flesh.

You will recall in the book of Genesis that Jacob was a very crafty, even deceitful man. The name, Jacob, means either, “He takes by the heel,” or “He cheats.” He conned his brother out of his birthright; he then deceived his father and stole the blessing that was intended for Esau. Our Old Testament passage this morning is when Jacob was en route to Uncle Laban’s house; he was fleeing his brother’s rage. While Jacob was with Laban he grew rich at the expense of his uncle. Uncle Laban and Jacob spent a couple decades out-tricking and out-smarting each other. Because of this Jacob’s name became almost synonymous with deceit. And it was when Jacob wrestled with the angel that his name was changed to ISRAEL. The name means, either He has striven with God, or God strives.

Now we see the humor in Jesus’ remark. Nathanael, a descendant of the great deceiver, had no deceit in him.

Nathanael responded, “How did you know me?” Nathanael also knew that he had no deceit in his character. Jesus answered, “I saw you, earlier, under the fig tree.”

At that point Nathanael answered, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!” Jesus responded, quite

understandably, “Because I said that I saw you under a fig tree, you believe?”

And it does seem incredible. Jesus saw Nathanael under a fig tree; that’s all. How can one make anything out of that? Yet, from that encounter Jesus knew the heart and character of Nathanael. He had not spoken with him. Jesus could see Nathanael for who he really was, from the inside, not just by appearance! He could see that Nathanael had no deceit in him.

Nathanael realized that he was known by Jesus. He realized that Jesus knew him through and through, and he only seemed to have looked at him while he was under the fig tree! Jesus did not have to do any interviewing or testing. From the beginning He knew Nathanael. It was enough for him to exclaim, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.”

Then it’s back to the images of Jacob. Jesus said to Nathanael, “You will see even greater things. You will see heaven opened up and you will see angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

The perspective in John’s Gospel is incredible. He makes us, the reader or listener, have to decide. Is Jesus for real; is all this just hocus-pocus? On the one hand Jesus is very much the human being, very real, very down to earth. But John keeps adding the perspective of Jesus from His Divine perspective. First it was how the Word was in the beginning and how the Word was God. Then we witness the Word descending and becoming a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. After that we go from a simple human meeting in which Jesus noted that he saw his future disciple under a fig tree, to a vision of a stairway to

heaven on which angels are going up and down. It is Jacob's ladder all over again.

The reader has to pause and think. Can I accept this stuff? Can it be for real? Can we accept and believe that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Divine, Eternal Word of God? Can we also hear Him call us? Can we hear Jesus invite us to confess that He is the Anointed One? Amen.

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