

First Sunday after the Epiphany  
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
I SAMUEL 3:1-10, (11-20)  
PSALM 139:1-6, 13-18  
I CORINTHIANS 6:12-20  
JOHN 1:43-51  
January 14, 2024

### ***Something Good Indeed!***

**Can anything from Eagle River be good? Can anything good come from Eagle River? Spoiler alert! Yes! Yes, it can! In today's Witness from the Gospels in John we find Jesus in the midst of calling his disciples, yes, the original twelve, apostles they would officially be called, "called" the operative word here. As Deb just mentioned, all men, some might calling that a mistake in retrospect! Evidently, Jesus had been engaging Philip in what surely was a deep conversation, Philip, a man from nearby Bethsaida, hometown of brothers Andrew and Peter. Philip found his brother Nathaniel and is purported to have said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth." Who knew? Yes, believe it or not, old man Joseph's son, yes, we have a Joseph sighting, uh citation, Joseph supposedly having little to do with the conception and birth of Jesus, something the Johannine writer fails to get, blissfully unaware, completely oblivious, no birth story mythically described in this very different, mysterious, Gospel. But I digress! I often do! Now aside from the fact that Moses never wrote anything, despite being credited with the first five books of the Bible, Torah, the Pentateuch, yes, called "The Five Books of Moses," Philip's bold declaration that Jesus indeed was the one, the long-awaited one, the Messiah, Christ in Greek, was about as radical a proclamation as any humble Jew could make. And yet, here we are! **Nathaniel evidently was unmoved, less than excited, obviously unimpressed by this****

radical, wildest, notion, naming this up-and-coming rabbi as a Messianic figure, labeling Jesus in a way that would mark with a bullseye any rank-and-file Jewish man. Nathaniel politely responds to this audacious claim, sighing with a sobering resignation, topped off with a rather insulting question, “Can anything from Nazareth be good?” This inquiry said much more about this one horse, a back water town in Galilee, than it says about Jesus. Galilee was a country that got very little regard, including very little mention, in the Bible. But this is the town from which Jesus hails, a small, insignificant, enclave, some scholars claiming the rabbi was even born there rather than in Bethlehem of the much more popular Judea. Echoing Carl Reiner’s 1979 flick starring Steve Martin, *The Jerk*, Jesus was born a poor olive Jewish child. This boy of questionable birth was born a carpenter’s son, carrying the weight of reputation and suspicion, illegitimate some said. I wonder if he was picked on, bullied, if there were indeed strange rumors that he was somehow the son of God. Could not have been easy! Not a problem! Jesus shunned titles, avoided labels, despite every flattering adjective reserved for Caesar being heaped upon him. Jesus was a product in every way of his roots. **And here we are provided with all the essential background we need to begin our weekly homiletical journey together.**

**Come and See!** After Nathaniel’s somewhat less than enthusiastic greeting, quickly lowering expectations while taking the proverbial air out of the balloon, devoid of a “Hi, how are you? I am Nathaniel, Philip’s brother,” Jesus politely ignores the obvious slight and says with confidence and conviction, perhaps even a touch of arrogance and cockiness, “Come and see!” Obviously, Jesus has already been up to something, many things perhaps, and rumor and innuendo, what at first seemed like idle gossip, was now being confirmed, becoming more and more verified as factual, word spreading like wildfire or a subtle flame, Jesus’ teachings and his activities the proof of the pudding that he could back up all his audacious claims. As a friend of

mine likes to say, “If you can do it, it ain’t bragging!” Hushed whispers, tempered by hope and fear, were becoming shouts of joy and gladness. Jesus was in essence telling Nathaniel not to believe a word he was saying, not to buy anything that he was selling, not to drink the Kool Aid that he or anyone else was serving, nothing anyone was telling him that day. Nathaniel, go and see for yourself! Yes, come and see! This dare, an outrageous request, reminds me of Jesus’ response to John shortly before the Baptizer lost his head. In another story we find the wild-man preacher and prophet now seemingly remorseful, regretting that he had served as his cousin’s lackey, John laying the foundation, doing all the legwork, the grunt work, as he provided the cornerstone, doing the groundwork in boldly proclaiming that Jesus was indeed the one, fulfilling the prophetic role as harbinger of the one who would be called Christ. Perhaps John, the crazy Essene, felt as though he had been used, a cheap vessel pimped by all the hype and hoopla heaped on one who, according to legend recorded throughout the Hebrew Bible, was supposed to come as a regal reigning monarch, destroying all Israel’s enemies, a warring Messianic figure full of anger and retribution, piss and vinegar as we say in the south, judgment and vengeance. What a disappointment! What an absolute joke Jesus had turned out to be, the rabbi revealing himself to be the very opposite, a peacenik polarity when juxtaposed against John’s ranting and raving, actions that got him put in lockdown in prison, his head eventually served on a platter, the thanks for all his efforts. Many scholars regard Jesus as nothing more or less than a peasant reformer, a man with little clout, not much status, followed by a ragtag bunch of complainers and malcontents. Probably true to some degree! And so, Jesus sends word to his depressed and distressed cousin, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me!” Well, alright then! In other words, dear cousin, do not believe the negativity, all the naysaying propaganda! Do not buy

into what you hear from detractors, fake news, alternative facts. John, trust me, because there is a lot of there, there, and their hollow criticisms are all a ruse designed to keep them in power. Sounds so familiar! In other words, cousin, “Come and see!” Your work was not in vain. Your words have not returned null and void! They have not come back empty! You can die proud and satisfied with all your work. Job well done you good and faithful servant! As you meet your maker, enter into the joy of the Lord!

**Come and see! As I pondered our sermon together for today, Nathaniel’s simple but profound question gave me pause to consider his inquiry in light of our context, our daily walk here as members of the First Congregational United Church of Christ. I was also inspired by the monthly mission and ministry initiative hatched by Mary Lou Condon and Barbara Helmick, two of the people behind the curtain continuously calling us to be a missional people, to fulfill our sacred call to be a local missional congregation. In this month of January, we are being asked to name the acts of kindness that we see manifest in our midst, reminding me of the wonderful adage, “practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty,” written by Anne Herbert on a restaurant place mat in 1982. Seems like only yesterday! I love this idea and already Post It notes are appearing, decorating the Narthex bulletin board. I am sure we will cover it by the end of the month! What a fabulous sight to behold! You still have plenty of time to add yours! I was reminded as I read some of these fragrant offerings of not only the great gifts given amidst this beloved faith community, but of Jesus’ suggestion to Nathaniel that he turn aside and see all the great sights, that he go and experience for himself, indeed that he prove the pudding of what was stirring all through the countryside because of the perceived new and radical rabbinic teaching and preaching unveiled by one Jesus of Nazareth, perception being a driving force fueling Jesus mission and ministry. No, in all candor there really was nothing new under the sun to see here! But objects**

can sure look different when viewed through the prisms of our highly reflective lenses. **Yes, Jesus' stuff had all the makings of new and improved, ushering in a new day dawning, and yet, his musings were as timeless as the faith tradition of his birth: love of God, love of neighbor, love of self.** There is a movement afoot ushering in a progressive revival within mainline Christianity, Christendom being renewed, transformationally reformed, in Jesus' transparent message. There is a groundswell that is enlivening the faith of our fathers and mothers, but it is inextricably tied to the person of Jesus, the historic man from Nazareth, with less focus, less emphasis, on the mystery of the cosmic Christ created and interpreted by the early Church, a process that began shortly after his death as his dejected and then resurrected followers looked in their collective rearview mirror. **Yes, the ecclesia, the Church universal and local churches, is coming full circle in our lifetimes. Yes, come and see! Come and see is the magnificent message that is ours to deliver, apparently in these parts uniquely ours to proclaim. Yes, we can proudly say to one and all, "Come and see!" Yes, come and see all the goings on, all that is happening, at First Congregational United Church of Christ. Come and see what we believe, what we think, the social justice for which we advocate, the theology that is unapologetically hospitably welcoming and inclusive, exclusion and exclusivity nowhere to be found on our collective radar. No qualifications, no ifs, ands, or buts! Come and see a human rainbow on display, always in action, despite appearing to be as mainly white as we are! Yes, come and see how we do Christian, how our understanding of Christianity may indeed seem different to the rank and file, and yet it is a narrative that, at its essence, is as old as its Jewish roots, as young as it was illustrated by Jesus, as younger still as with each convert and committed follower since the time the rabbi first called his originals. Yes, come and see! We have a lot to share, show and tell happening every time we meet.**

**If someone asks how big we are as a church, just ask them in return, do you mean in numbers or influence? Our goal is to not be the best kept secret in Eagle River, but instead to boldly proclaim with all our being that something good indeed is happening within and beyond these walls. Yes, we must learn to brag, to boast of our accomplishments, appropriately and politely of course, to toot our own horn in every acceptable way imaginable. If we do not tell our story, then who, pray tell, will do that for us? Those who do not declare, proclaim, their own narrative are subject to the opinions of others, including naysayers, often doomed to have critics do that for them! Our story is our story to tell! Using a scriptural image, always good to get a little more Bible into a sermon, we cannot hide our light under a bushel (Matthew 5:15). We should beam with pride; this kind of pride never goes before a fall. After all, it was Paul who often spoke about boasting, this divine image evidently used up to forty-seven times in his epistles. That is a lot of braggadocios! Think along with me for a moment. NATH at Frederick Place: Come and see! Daniel Brunstad's initiative: Come and see! Maui relief: Come and see! A mission trip for Confirmands: Come and see! Northland Pines School Lunch Debt relief: Come and see! Micah Project: Come and see! Honduras aid: Come and see! Warm the Children: Come and see! Guide Dogs for the Blind: Come and see! \$8,750. In action, Come and See! Our Northwestern Association, our Wisconsin Conference, our national setting of the United Church of Christ! Come and see! Locally and a lot more closer to home, our church staff! Come and see! And all of you, all of us combined, each one created in the divine image as a fragrant gift of the Holy, right here and right now as beloved community, a church family of faith, gathered in this sacred setting for such a time as this, for such a church as this! Come and see! Yes, something good indeed!**

**In the name of the One who creates, redeems, and sustains, and is building something good indeed in this place and invites one and all to come and see! Amen and amen!**