

“Eureka!”
+ 2 Epiphany, Year B+
Samuel 3:1-20; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51
January 18, 2015

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen. The text for this morning’s message is today’s Gospel.

A very, very long time ago, according to a Greek legend, the ancient mathematician, Archimedes, discovered an immutable unchangeable truth while testing to see if the king’s crown was made entirely of gold or was an alloy. He had been stymied by the task until one day, while stepping into his bath tub; he noticed that the water level rose as he sat down. Instantly, it struck Archimedes that by comparing an object’s weight to the volume of water it displaced, he could determine an object’s density. All he had to do was compare the weight of a tiny gram of pure gold to the weight of the crown, and the weight of the water the crown displaced. Archimedes was so excited that he jumped up out of his tub and ran stark naked through the city streets of Syracuse shouting, “Eureka!” I have found it.” Who says physicists are uninteresting?

The Gospel this morning tells us of another man whose life was changed by the discovery of the ultimate immutable unchangeable truth. Eight short verses tell his story. The context is that after Jesus was baptized by John, he went up north to Nazareth in Galilee. There he found Philip and invited him to “Follow me” and that’s what Philip did, impressed by Jesus, urged on by John the Baptizer and encouraged, I think, by the brothers Peter and Andrew whom Jesus had invited to follow Him just the day before. Back then, just as now, following Jesus meant becoming part of something larger – part of a company of believers. Now-a-days we call that company a congregation that is part of the church at large – the “body of Christ.”

The Gospel goes on to say that after Jesus “found” Philip, Philip went and “found” Nathanael and told him that “we” have “found” the one “about whom Moses...and the prophets wrote, Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth.” But there is something subtle here that begins to explain what is going to prove a rapid transformation in Nathanael and takes us back to naked Archimedes running through the streets shouting “Eureka!” Three times in the verses we have looked at so far, one Greek verb appears and is translated as “found.” The verb is HEURISKO. Though I’ve never understood why anyone would cry out “Eureka!” at anything they’d found in Kansas “Eureka” is the perfect – or past perfect tense of HEURISKO that gives

us the word “Eureka” to shout when we’ve made an astounding find. But that’s not the whole story. There is a theological wrinkle that makes this text so sweet: you see, “Eureka” does not mean “I have found it” so much as it means “it has found me.” For Archimedes the answer came not in the laboratory after long hours at the chalkboard but in the bath tub where he had an “aha moment” when everything he had been considering coalesced.

Back to the Gospel now, so far in Jesus’ public life, John the Baptizer, Andrew, Peter and Philip had had “Eureka moments” as they came to believe that Jesus was the promised One – which, we would have to say is the moment where God found them – when the Holy Spirit granted them faith to see the eternal unchangeable immutable truth that Jesus is the Son of God/Messiah/Savior. Nathanael’s “Eureka moment” was about to happen but first he couldn’t resist a sarcastic moment saying to Philip: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (You see Nazareth was a northern nowhere; a place where Hebrew zealots hung out when they weren’t killing Roman soldiers as deceitful insurrectionists motivated by their religion and lack of a voice to overcome the oppression of the Roman Empire – though their actions succeeded best at inciting Roman governors to retaliate and kill even more Israelites). “Could anything good come from Nazareth?” No way! No how!

Here is the twist “When Jesus saw Nathanael he said of him, “here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” That’s an odd way to greet a stranger! It is the same as saying, “here comes a man who is not a liar.” But if you knew, as Nathanael would have, that the word “Israelite” comes from the word “Israel” which is the name God gave to Jacob after their all-night wrestling match in Genesis 32, you would know that Israel means “one who struggles with God” as well as knowing that Jacob means “a cheater” (tricky, usurper, heel-grabber – though it doesn’t say that in the Baby Name Book). So an Israelite in whom there is no deceit is a person completely unlike their forefather Jacob or those Hebrew zealots from Nazareth. Jesus is telling Nathaniel he is a person who struggles honestly with God. That is a beautiful compliment – an indication of Nathaniel’s heart even though he had just insulted Jesus, His hometown, and those who went there to hide. Jesus saw his heart – sinful and yet honestly striving with God. Wow.

That lovely observation took Nathanael aback a bit so he asked, “Where did you get to know me?” to which Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Now that could be as simple as Jesus seeing Nathanael while Nathanael was looking the other

way though Nathaniel's response indicates it was a miracle. But, again there's some sweet subtext, as in Micah, (4:4) 1 Kings (4:25) and Isaiah (36:16) it was the blessed reality in the Kingdom of Israel and the great hope after they were in exile that they, as God's people would again live at peace with God and one another among the vines in their vineyards or sitting under their fig trees. That would happen when Messiah came – Messiah/Jesus saw Nathaniel under the fig tree struggling with God and now Jesus stood before him and “EUREKA!” Nathaniel was face-to-face with the mediator between God and humanity. When the temple was destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant lost the Israelites, in rebuilding went to where Jacob/Israel had seen the angels descending and ascending from the Throne of God. They went to this place Bethel (BETH EL – “house of God”) and pried out the stone that was Jacob's pillow. They put it in the Holy of Holies and poured the blood of sacrifice on it once a year as their place to come directly before God – until Messiah arrived and the curtain of the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom and through Jesus all of us can always come before God's Throne of Grace.

Ah, but I'm jumping ahead, though it does explain Nathanael's sudden Eureka like outburst: “Rabbi, you are the son of God and the King of Israel.” Both of those titles could have gotten Nathanael killed, either by the Jews for blasphemy (for calling another human being the son of God) or by the Romans for treason for proclaiming a new king where Caesar ruled. Nathanael just had his “Eureka” moment, which is what happens when you “come and see” and the one whom you see is Jesus. “EUREKA” – you are the Son of God! You found me! You found me!

In this short exchange of words Jesus revealed himself completely to Nathanael as the contact point between God and man whose blood would be spilled for the sins of the world and through whom we would see heaven open and upon whom the angels would descend and with whom, on the last day, we will all ascend into the glories of heaven around the Throne of God.

We read this Gospel during Epiphany because it reminds us that we have not only been invited to “come and see” and to “come and follow” as disciples but also commissioned to “go and tell.” Tell what? So soon after the celebration of the Incarnation we can tell others that God broke into humanity – became one of us to save us. Perhaps you can share times when God's Word has been opened up to you and a great discovery of grace, peace, or answered prayer has

changed your life because of Jesus, God's Son. No one can tell you exactly how to "go and tell" – learn the basics, share them openly, and be prepared for God to work through the Holy Spirit. Like Nathaniel, knowing the details made the big picture suddenly become clear and the eternal unchangeable immutable truth that he'd been found by God changed him for eternity. Also, it's not just telling – it's living it. Whatever work God gives you to accomplish do it all to the glory, honor and praise of God. Brian Kruchowski did that here as our building manager, not just making sure the facility was clean but working with so many people who came to our door in need – fixing up cars for them, working out arrangements for ministry to take place in every room and corner of this facility – mentoring Boy Scouts, meeting in prayer for the congregation on Saturday mornings. Bridget set her eyes on starting a Women's Bible Study ministry and it continues to thrive on Wednesday evenings and touches so many lives in this place and beyond.

Both of these servants of God, gifted with faith by the Holy Spirit know the simple truth that when all of the pieces of history have been put together, before them, before all of us will stand the One who came as promised, died to save us, rose to conquer death and will come again to take us home. Even those who aren't speaking Greek may say "Eureka" on that great and final day "I have found it." But as every knee bows and tongue confesses Jesus as Lord we will know, thanks to God's amazing grace, it is we who were lost, we who have been found by the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Now may our Lord Jesus, the Christ, our merciful redeemer, enable us by His spirit, to see Him clearly, love Him dearly and follow Him more nearly until we are eternally in God's presence!