

Epiphany 2, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 1: 43 – 46

Again from the Gospel of John, chapter 1.

Jesus, who was from Nazareth, decided to go to Galilee. There He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Philip then found Nathaniel and said to him, “We have found the Messiah! It’s Jesus, from Nazareth!” Nathaniel then said to Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

The Gospel of our Lord. And we pray:

Heavenly Father, you have made great and glorious promises to those who put their trust in you. And we believe, though it’s not always easy. Help us see you at work in all the ups and downs of life, and give us faith to endure, and to hope, and to follow, knowing as we do that at last we shall reach your promised land; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, AMEN.

“Can anything good, come out of Nazareth? I mean, it’s such a dumpy little town, and the people there have never been friendly at least not to me, and I’ve never enjoyed myself down in Nazareth at all so tell me, Philip,” said Nathaniel to his friend, that long ago day. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Well, if only he knew, huh. If only he knew, Nathaniel is about to get the biggest surprise of his entire life, can anything good come out of Nazareth?—you better believe it! In mere moments Nathaniel will be standing in the presence of none other than Jesus Christ. For the next three years Nathaniel will then follow Jesus, hearing the Lord’s words witnessing the Lord’s miracles learning God’s gracious will for himself, and for all creation. Nathaniel will see Jesus die and rise again, so can anything good come out of Nazareth? Well, duh, Christ came out of Nazareth. Forgiveness of sin life and salvation came out of Nazareth, so I guess the answer has to be yeah! Yeah, a lot of good can come, even from Nazareth!

Now it would be rather easy I suppose to just, I don’t know—leave it at that? I mean here’s an embarrassing little moment for Nathaniel, he ‘spoke too soon’ as the old saying goes, but no real harm done, after all, he ends up a disciple of Jesus, right? Ok. Here’s the question. What is Nazareth for you. What place, what person; what set of circumstances is Nazareth for you? “Can anything good come out of.....” what. How might you fill in the blank.

Can anything good come out of disease, or ill health. I had a parishioner back in Indiana, not

that you'll ever go out to our little town there and start asking around but I'll change his name now anyway, I'll call him Mike. As a very young man Mike had been somewhat well acquainted with law enforcement, and they had been somewhat well acquainted with him—nuff said. He kept his church membership but, lots of people do—no big deal there. He developed MS, and in the 9 years I knew him went from being a pretty healthy guy holding down a regular job, to practically being home bound; an invalid; age 40. But in those 9 years he also became a very strong, very active member of our congregation, he got himself *and his extended family* back to the Lord, and maybe you can guess what comes next. The day he told me that this disease of his, was the best thing that had ever happened to him. Now this was not something I was ever going to walk up and say to him, “You know Mike I think this disease has been rather good for you”—that would be somewhat cheesy, I think. Best to let people over time come to that sort of realization for themselves. And he did. “Pastor Steve,” he said one day, “MS is the best thing that ever happened to me. It got me to church, and it got me to Jesus.”

That was Mike, back in Indiana. So what about you. What is Nazareth for you, what event what set of circumstances; what person out there makes you think “Nothing good's ever going to come out of this one. This is a complete disaster beginning middle end”—what out there makes you say that? And in the end, could you be wrong? Maybe? Now this is not to say that disease is a good thing, that death is wonderful or loss is a cause for celebration. This is not to say that every person you meet out there is really and truly a sweetheart—they are not. Painful people, painful events, painful moments pop up in all of our lives, and we don't have to pretend. Not with each other, not with our God, we do not have to pretend. This stuff hurts, we don't like it, and we wish it was all very different. Just as Nathaniel really didn't like Nazareth, there are parts of life we really don't like either. And you don't have to pretend, least of all with God.

Still. Even though we each have a Nazareth and really don't like it. That's not the same as saying, Nothing good will ever come of this; whatever it is. We might not want to say that,

because we really don't know that. We don't know that this "Nazareth" of ours will *never* produce something good, because what we DO know is this: We have a great and a mighty and a wonderful God, who has not given up on you. And who has not given up on Nazareth either. Every bit of our lives, including the parts that cause us sadness and pain, it all is and remains in God's hands. And God is not done yet. Part of faith is simply giving God the chance, to be God. Part of faith is just giving God the chance to do something unexpected, with your Nazareth.

Can anything good come, out of a crucifixion. It's a loaded question, you know the answer, 2000 years down the road; but imagine Nathaniel. Imagine Philip, and the others. Words cannot describe a Roman style crucifixion, what good can ever come out of this? Oh, nothing much, only the salvation of the world. Nothing much, only the redemption of us and all creation, small potatoes, right? The God who brought good from Nazareth, and who brought the salvation of the world out of a Roman style crucifixion, can do pretty much anything He wants to do. Hand Him your Nazareth. Let God be God and let God take it from there. And He will, as always in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

I always want you to pay attention to the hymns we sing, they teach, they build up. Verse 3 in the pulpit hymn (Songs of Thankfulness and Praise) especially. We rise to sing.