

January 14, 2024
2nd Sunday after the Epiphany
1 Sam. 3:1-10, 1 Cor. 6:12-20, John 1:43-51
“A Good Invasion of your privacy”

Many times today we consider it a bad invasion of our privacy when something unexpected happens that threatens us or makes us feel uncomfortable. We always have to be on guard to protect ourselves from scammers and those who would want to take advantage of us, especially through the internet.

Unfortunately we live in an age where sites like google want to know everything about us. What you like, what you are shopping for, what you're interests are. It's like a private detective following you around.

Google knows where you have been and at what time, your photos, the terms you search for, everything you have deleted, your advertising profile, all the apps you use, your UTUBE history, your Word documents, bookmarks, emails, every question you've asked your google device, and your contacts and more.

I know this because two times our home wi-fi has been hacked and both times it was my fault. I opened up something I shouldn't have and voila, a message went out to all our contacts, even people that we hadn't communicated with for many years.

It ended up being a nightmare as we spent a whole day sending out apologies and explanations to people that thought we were having some kind of difficulty. It was an invasion of privacy that was very bad.

However, from our Gospel Lesson this morning, we learn about an invasion of privacy that was very good. Two men, Philip and Nathanael, were found by the Lord, known by the Lord, and then informed by the Lord.

Jesus wants to invade our privacy for the same reason and in the same way so that we can be found by the Lord, known by the Lord and then informed by the Lord. I call that, “A Good Invasion of Your Privacy”.

The impression that many people have about God is that He is just sitting back waiting for sinners to find him but that's not how the true God operates. We see that already in the Garden of Eden.

After Adam and Eve fell into sin, God did not wait for his children to come to Him and confess what they had done. He went searching for them – not only to chastise but also to share that He had a plan to get them out of the mess they had willingly stepped into.

Likewise when you look at how Jesus ended up with his Twelve Disciples, you'll see that it's because He went searching for them. Philip went to report to his friend Nathanael saying, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"

Philip did not find Jesus. Jesus had found Philip and that's how it works with you too. You didn't find Jesus when you came to faith. You came to faith because Jesus found you.

That's how it has to work. Paul explains it this way: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved"

Think of a hiker who has fallen down a cliff and broken his ankle. He may say to his rescuers: "I'm glad I found you!" but everyone really knows that because of his condition what he means is "I'm glad you found me!"

That's how it with us as well. Sin has so damaged us, that by nature, we don't even want to reach out to God so He needs to reach out to us if we're going to be saved from our sins.

But how exactly does Jesus find us these days? He's not still walking the streets as He did two thousand years ago when He found Philip. No! But look at the way in which Jesus found the next disciple, Nathanael. He did it through Philip.

After Philip was brought to faith he ran off and found his friend Nathanael to tell him about Jesus. That is how Jesus still finds people today – through the witness of faithful disciples like you. One person telling another person telling another person and so on.

But does the thought of telling another person about Jesus make you nervous? I mean what if they ask you a question about your faith that you can't answer? Well, don't worry about that. Just use Philip's evangelism approach.

When he told Nathanael he believed Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, Nathanael asked: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Now look at how Philip responds? Did he try to convince his friend of the truth with a rehearsed evangelism presentation? No, he simply said, "Come and see."

That's still a great tactic when you are witnessing today. Simply invite your friends to come and see the Savior for them-selves and don't just encourage them to come to church, invite them to Bible study as well and keep on inviting them again and again and again.

And if you've been the one invited to meet Jesus through His Word, then respond as Nathanael did. When he went with Philip to meet Jesus, he went and he saw and he witnessed and he believed.

For Nathanael, finding the Messiah, the one who would take away his sins and open eternal life to him was more important to him than his work, his hobbies, and even his family. It's a great story of commitment coming from faith. But I wonder if we feel the same way?

Or when we are invited to come and see our Savior through a study of his Word, are we quick to come up with an excuse of why it's not convenient? Maybe some other time.

But how do you know there will be a more convenient time? You don't, because none of us knows when our end will come. Even as I speak right now, Jesus is invading your privacy and reaching out to you through this message, inviting you to learn more about him and promising you that you won't be sorry that you did, so be welcome the opportunity to hear, to learn and to know more about God.

It's interesting that when Nathanael came to meet Jesus, he was in for a surprise, for he was already known by the Lord. John records the meeting like this. "When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel"

Whenever I read this section of Scripture from John, I always wonder, "What exactly had Nathanael been doing under the fig tree that it was significant enough for Jesus to mention and for Nathanael to be impressed that Jesus knew he had been sitting there?"

Perhaps that fig tree was Nathanael's getaway spot - the place he went to be alone. Then I think about how thousands of years earlier Adam and Eve had also sought refuge under a fig tree after their sin of eating the forbidden fruit.

They took the fig tree's leaves and sewed them together to make clothing. It was a lame attempt to cover their shame. Is that also what Nathanael had been doing under the fig tree – hiding out because he was embarrassed of who he was and what he had done or failed to do?

If so, it was a good invasion of privacy when Philip found him there because if Nathanael was ashamed of what he had become and was seeking God's forgiveness, Philip had the solution. The Messiah had come! Come and see Him.

Just as God provided better covering for Adam and Eve when He gave them sheepskin clothing, so Jesus, the Lamb of God, would provide a perfect covering to hide Nathanael's sins from the God's Holy view.

That's in fact why Jesus could say of Nathanael, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false". Jesus says the same thing of you this morning - that there is nothing false in you.

Even if you lied to someone about why you couldn't come over to their house for dinner or you made up some excuse why you couldn't help someone out on a particular day, Jesus says that He sees no deceit in you because He's already paid the penalty for those sins.

So now Jesus invites you to stand in the full light of His glory and receive the fullness of being a child of God instead of slinking around in the shadows of sin, wallowing in your guilt. Jesus knows all but He forgives you.

Nathanael was impressed with Jesus' omniscience or His ability to know all things – even where Nathanael had been hanging out, but that's not what Jesus wanted Nathanael to marvel about.

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree but you shall see greater things than that." And then He added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man".

Philip and Nathanael had both been found and known by the Lord, and now they were going to be informed by him. They were going to learn the truth of what we all need to know and believe to get into heaven. Jesus is the way!

Jesus compared himself to a ladder that connects heaven and earth – a ladder on which angels would ascend and descend. This was a reference to a well-known event from Jewish history.

Jesus was thinking about the time when Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was forced to run away from his home. On his first night, Jacob lay down to sleep on the hard ground and had nothing but a rock to use as a pillow.

It probably didn't seem as if God was with him. And why should he be? It had been Jacob's sin and his lack of trust in God's promises that had forced him to flee in the first place.

But instead of seeing nightmares, Jacob received a wonderful dream that night. He saw a ladder which stretched all the way up to heaven and on that ladder angels went up and down.

This was God's way of reassuring Jacob that he was not alone. God had not abandoned him in spite of his sins. Jacob's prayers were being heard and God was answering them by sending angels to attend to him.

Now in our Gospel Lesson, Jesus explains how He, Himself is the ladder which connects heaven to earth. It is through Jesus that we ascend to heaven with the angels and we do so on the ladder of his cross.

So today we are glad that God cared enough about us to break into our world and save us from our sins. To share that truth with the lost and the lonely, the guilty and the downtrodden and with all who are hanging out by themselves under their fig trees.

God's invasion of our privacy is welcomed as our lives are exposed to the truth of His Word, the promises of His salvation and the assurance of knowing that we are in good hands, today and forever more.

May God bless us to be a blessing to others as we extend God's invitation out to those around us so that they too can share the joy and privilege of what a good invasion of privacy is all about, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.