

## **"CLAIMED, BLESSED, SENT: BELOVED COMMUNITY"**

**John 1:43-51**

**January 14, 2018**

*<sup>43-44</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. When he got there, he ran across Philip and said, "Come, follow me." (Philip's hometown was Bethsaida, the same as Andrew and Peter.)*

*<sup>45-46</sup> Philip went and found Nathanael and told him, "We've found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets. It's Jesus, Joseph's son, the one from Nazareth!" Nathanael said, "Nazareth? You've got to be kidding. Can anything good ever come out of Nazareth?"*

*But Philip said, "Come, see for yourself."*

*<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw him coming he said, "There's a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body."*

*<sup>48</sup> Nathanael said, "Where did you get that idea? You don't know me."*

*Jesus answered, "One day, long before Philip called you here, I saw you under the fig tree."*

*<sup>49</sup> Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi! You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!"*

*<sup>50-51</sup> Jesus said, "You've become a believer simply because I say I saw you one day sitting under the fig tree? You haven't seen anything yet! Before this is over you're going to see heaven open and God's angels descending to the Son of Man and ascending again."*

Nathanael:

I had no choice in the matter. I was not given a day to think about it, or even an afternoon or an hour. We had no meal together; we

did not pray about this together. There was no logical reason for me to follow him. He was just Jesus, the carpenter's son, Jesus of Nazareth. *Nothing* good ever comes out of Nazareth! I don't get it.

I am Nathanael, one of the 12, part of the Beloved Community of Christ. I am a simple man, from Cana, in Galilee. I am a simple man like Jesus, but no, not like Jesus—not like Jesus at all, actually. I have been graced to have witnessed Jesus in all his glory as well in all his humanness. And he was like no other I have known or heard of in all the world.

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I was his disciple, and along with the others, as time went on and we traveled together all over Galilee, I was treated as a witness to some pretty rare stuff from him—miracles, signs, and eye-popping teachings and fiery exchanges with religious and political leaders. But when I first met him, I was skeptical.

Nazareth was a small and insignificant village of maybe 200 or 300 people. It wasn't even mentioned in the scriptures anywhere. How could anyone special come from there? From all first impressions, Jesus was an ordinary human; I was with him as he got thirsty, he got hungry, he needed rest, and he exhibited all the range of emotions, the same as me.

But he was *special*. He was *royalty*. I have no doubt he was the true Son of God. He claimed me; he blessed me. He claimed me and he

blessed me and he sent me out into the world as one of the Beloved Community of the faithful. My destiny was laid out before me the day I met him, and I didn't even know it.

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There I was, minding my own business, when my friend, Philip, came rushing up to me all a flutter and out of breath! He was yelling excitedly some nonsense about Moses and the prophets, about law and promise. I tell you, he was frothing at the mouth and talking nonsense!

"Slow down! *Slow down*," I cautioned him. "Now, start over. What's this you are saying about Jesus, the carpenter's son?"

"Jesus wants me to follow him, and I want you to come with us, too!" Philip was making these wild gestures, and he was adamant that I listen to him. He took me by the shoulders, and said, "Come, and see for yourself."

And I had to, you know. I had to go check out this spectacle for myself. I was wary and I was holding back. In our day, it wasn't safe to make too much of a big deal about a simple preacher; the Romans were *always* watching what we Jews did, just waiting for us to trip up and give them a reason to arrest us. But it was a compelling enough story my friend was telling that I had to go and see for myself. I was known around town as a person without guile; I was honest and genuine in my business and personal relationships. That's how my parents

taught me to be. I wanted to take an honest look at what was unfolding before us.

A man has to have integrity to be right with God. And I think it important that we be open-minded, curious to see what God has in store for us. I am not sure if Philip was drafting me into the mission of Jesus, or just unsure himself and wanting a level-headed person to examine his sense of call. Either way, at his urging, I found myself in the marketplace with Philip, looking for an experience of God.

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Jesus saw me coming. It was though he could see right through my questioning exterior into my very heart. We knew of each other, but we had never before met. It was uncanny. He complimented my reputation right off. "Now here's a true Israelite without a deceitful bone in his body!" he said. I was so taken aback. No stranger had ever before been so forward with me! I was *captivated*. I was pulled to him as though I had no say in the matter.

"How do you know this about me?" I stammered. "You've never even met me!" When I think back now on his answer, it makes no sense, but at the time, it was all I needed to hear to declare him my Rabbi. He said he had seen me one day standing beneath a fig tree. So, what? What can you tell about a person who is standing at a distance under a tree?

It's nonsense, right? But at the time, it was *compelling*. I knew somehow deep in my soul that I was having a conversation that day with the true Son of God and I told him so. I told him he was the true Son of God and the King of Israel.

I guess I was an easy convert. Even Jesus was surprised at how quickly I said I would follow him. But I had felt God tap my shoulder. Here was I, an insignificant little human from an equally insignificant little burg, kind of like Parker, I suppose, and God was calling me!

Jesus was calling me to follow him; he said that if I came along, I would see him one day claimed by the angels. He painted this word picture of the very the heavens opening above us and then the angels descending onto him and then ascending again spectacularly into the sky. It was a fantastic daydream! I was completely swept into it, ready to give up everything to follow this man, this King, this chosen One.

And here's the truly healing thing about my exchange with Jesus, the Son of God. It came in the nature of an *epiphany*. It showed me in an insight that God wants to be in direct relationship with me-- with us all! It showed me that God, the Word, could be so deeply invested in the human story as to call to greatness a simple carpenter's son from Nazareth, of all places. It showed me a more perfect way to be in

communion with our Beloved Creator. Jesus did that for us. And that day, Jesus did that directly for me.

Now, I don't know about your epiphanies, but mine have always come to me that way. Sometimes they are huge ones, like when I reflect on the day that I was called to be a disciple, but most often they are tiny little ones that inform me in more subtle ways.

I remember having one little epiphany that convinced me to leave my hometown and venture out to the greater world. I had another the day Philip came into my life and I knew we would be bosom buddies from then on. Little ones. And one big one, one really big one that day in the public square.

Either way, I am most aware of the presence of God after the fact. That's what happened to me that day with Jesus. It was not until I had time to reflect on it that when he said he saw me under a fig tree, I was taken back to a verse from the scriptures. I was recalling a passage from the book of Zechariah, which said something about one day being able to invite others to come under your vine and fig tree.

I had been standing under a fig tree and to Jesus, I was inviting him into communion with me. Hmm. Maybe he had an epiphany moment that day, too! He didn't forget about me, and when he perchance saw me again, he seized upon the moment and lived into the scripture's call on us both.

It was not until later that I understood what he was saying about following him until the day the angels descended out of the heavens and claimed him. For I was there that day as his witness. Though you never read about me in any of the other gospels, not even once, and John only mentions me one more in his gospel writing, in the very last chapter of his book, I was there for it all as a disciple of Jesus. I was one of the Beloved Community. I was with him at the beginning, and I was there when the angels descended for him and took him up to heaven. I was there when he returned to us on the Sea of Galilee one morning and helped us catch a boatload of fish.

He became known to us again that day. John wrote it down as it was told to him many decades after the fact; you just have to take my word for it. He shared a meal of our fish with us. It was the third time he had appeared to us since he was crucified. Fantastic, I know! But I hope you will believe me!

He took us aside, and then he asked Simon Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" Peter answered, "Yes, Master, you know I love you." Then Jesus simply said, "Feed my sheep."

Looking back on it, I realize now that we were being commissioned that day as ministers of the Word for the people of God. Another epiphany, understood later. At the time, my mouth was just hanging open as I witnessed Jesus among us again, just like old times. I did not understand what was happening, and I did not expect that he would

leave us for a fourth time, and this time he would not return. He left this ministry to us. I was a witness. I was blessed, claimed, and sent—one of the Beloved Community to grow the Beloved Community.

When I am blessed to experience my epiphany moments, I am convinced that God is with me—with us, here, in the human experience. I find that the visions of the Lord are not so rare as I had previously thought. God is still here with us, still speaking and revealing God's self and inviting our reflection. We are invited to be aware of the divine presence in our own little insignificant lives. We just have to reflect on our experiences in order to see or hear God.

Many centuries from now our story will still be told. There will be a verse from a spiritual, "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," and it will be sung, "There ain't but one train that's on this track; it runs to heaven and it runs right back." Our story will be told and you will understand better than I, perhaps, the impact Jesus will have on the world for generations to come. It's up to us—you and me—to see to it that the story and the promise and the light of God in Jesus lives on.

If Jesus could read my heart that day in the square, he can read yours, too, now, wherever you may want to be found. If Jesus could recognize me standing aways away from him under a fig tree, he can recognize you, too. We are the Beloved Community, all of us. From the first century to your century. We are blessed. We are claimed. And we are sent. Are you open to Jesus reading your heart? Are you?

*May It Be So.*