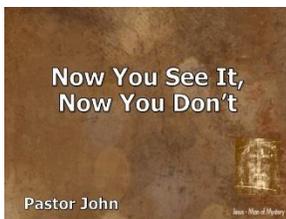


Now You See It, Now You Don't (Communion)

January 14, 2017

John 1: 43-51

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."



Last week we began our "Jesus – Man of Mystery" series as Justin Peterson looked at the baptism of Jesus. In the passage from Mark 1, we saw God just beginning to reveal Jesus' identity as the voice from heaven said, *"You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased"*. In Jesus' baptism, God revealed enough of who Jesus was to compel others to start the journey to know Him more. Andrew and Peter were originally disciples of John the Baptist. They would have heard God's

voice that day and then later the voice of John, proclaiming Jesus to be the Lamb of God. With these words, Andrew and Peter leave everything behind and go to follow Jesus. Today we continue with our study of Jesus as we also seek to move forward on our own journey of faith. Let us pray.

Since there is a bit of mystery in Jesus, let's begin by having a little fun...

- 1) I want each of you to think of a number between 1-9.
- 2) Now multiply that number by nine.
- 3) Add the digits of your answer together (if 35, $3 + 5 = 8$).
- 4) Now subtract five.
- 5) Now if A=1, B=2, C=3 etc., what letter is represented by your number?
- 6) Now think of a country beginning with that letter.
- 7) Next think of a mammal beginning with the LAST letter of that country.
- 8) Next think of a fruit beginning with the LAST letter of that animal.

So, you all started out with different numbers, and now you're thinking of a country, an animal, and a fruit. Let me see if I can read someone's mind out there... This doesn't make much sense... There aren't many kangaroos living in Denmark who eat oranges, are there? Were you surprised? Maybe just a little bit amazed? Well, as we continue with our sermon series, we will see how with Jesus, things are not always obvious at first, yet we too are compelled to follow

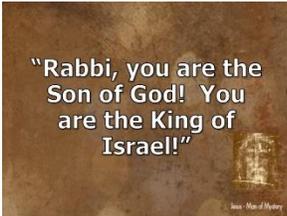


along, to stay engaged in the story, to see where the story might lead us, and to see where Jesus might lead us. Sometimes we can see so clearly who Jesus is and what He is calling us to. Yet at other times, we have a much harder time discerning the path that Jesus is calling us to walk. In these ways, our faith is often a 'now you see it, now you don't' kind of faith.



As we pick up today's scripture, Jesus has already begun His ministry. As we reviewed earlier, Andrew and Peter have both left John to answer the call to follow Jesus. In today's passage, Jesus returns with them to their hometown and He says to Philip, "*Follow me*". It is a simple and direct request. We do not know if Philip knows anything about Jesus or if this is his first encounter with Jesus. All we know is that Jesus invited him into discipleship and that Philip chose to follow Jesus. If Philip did know of Jesus, his knowledge would have probably been minimal at best. Yet Philip is willing to drop everything, to leave all behind, to follow this man. And not only that, but Philip then goes and finds his friend Nathanael and tells him that they have found the One whom Moses and the prophets spoke of – the Messiah. Unlike his friend Philip, Nathanael is a bit more skeptical at first. He hears what his friend has to say and can probably sense the excitement within Philip. Yet he still replies with, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth*"? Nazareth is a small, remote village. It is full of people just eking out a living. It is not a town of royalty or power or importance.

But Philip is not deterred and he simply responds, *"Come and see"*. This invitation was enough to at least interest Nathanael to go and see what his friend was talking about. What happens next in our story is a bit of a magic trick. As Philip and Nathanael approach Jesus, He says, *"Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit"*! Jesus goes on to explain that He observed this as He watched Nathanael sitting under the fig tree. All of Nathanael's questioning about why Philip would follow this Jesus and all of his own questioning about anything good coming out of Nazareth vanish in a puff of smoke as Jesus suddenly appears to be someone with great power. Nathanael exclaims, *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel"*! Jesus then lets him know that this is just the beginning, that he will see much greater things than these.



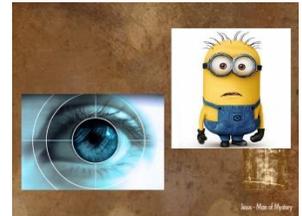
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The way that Jesus convinced Nathanael to follow him has some similarities to the art of magic. Through the use of techniques like misdirection and cognitive illusion, occurrences that we know are not possible seem to be possible. Jesus bumps Nathanael out of his logical, sensible frame of mind by revealing something about Nathanael that Jesus could have only known through some means that were unexplainable. The magic trick usually begins by the illusionist helping us to think that we have discovered the secret to the trick or illusion. Once we think we know how or why the trick works, our ability to focus on how the trick is really works is reduced greatly. We become too distracted to notice the obvious that is happening right in front of us. Once we have our own correct solution to the magic trick in mind, it becomes difficult for us to pay attention to any other alternatives.



We see this kind of a thing happening with John the Baptist as he was beginning to preach, baptize, and build a following. Many people saw and heard John and they began to think that he was the One. Even though he clearly denied it, the people and even the religious leaders were so focused on John being the One that they missed Jesus – the One actually standing in their midst. John absolutely denied being the Christ or Elijah or another prophet. He even told those around him that the light had come into the world. Not until John point blank identifies Jesus as the One, as the Lamb of God, do Andrew and Peter leave John to follow Jesus. For many others, they remained convinced that John was the One, preventing them from recognizing Jesus as the Messiah who had come to save the world. They could not pay attention to the other alternative at hand.

The reality of our faith is that at times we find ourselves here as well, don't we? On our faith journeys, we fluctuate from having a laser focus on who and what Jesus is to us and in our lives to having a hard time remembering to love others as Jesus loves us. We can become so focused on what we think Jesus is calling us to that we lose sight of where He is really trying to lead us. It can also be easy for our faith to become about us instead of about Jesus. We can focus in on the things of our faith instead of on the faith itself. It can be easy to come to church or to Bible study because that's just what we do. But in the midst of that, we can forget to actually worship God while at church or to really wrestle with our faith while at Bible study.



So we see that in many ways, our faith can be a 'now you see it, now you don't' kind of faith. This can also be revealed in how we live out our faith consistently in our day to day lives. Yes, we are loving and caring parents or spouses or friends most of the time. Then suddenly we can say or do something that makes others wonder if we have ever met Jesus. Have you experienced this kind of a now and then faith? If we are honest, we all have and we all do and we all will.



Part of this is because we follow a Savior who is not always easily identifiable or definable or understandable. Early on the Jewish people were looking for a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans and re-establish the kingdom of Israel. When Jesus was not this, many people had a hard time seeing Him for who He was. They could not see that He came to establish the kingdom of God here on earth because they thought they knew what it would look like. This Messiah did not fit their definition of a messiah. Many people could not understand how love could triumph over all – even over death and the grave. Jesus did not fit inside of their box.

We too are guilty of wanting Jesus to fit into our box now and then too. We want Jesus to be this or that for us. We pray for this thing to happen or for that other thing not to happen. We can also get stuck on who we think Jesus is or who we want Jesus to be or what we think Jesus should do. When that does not happen, we get stuck and it becomes difficult for us to pay attention to any other alternatives. It is then that we are more likely to miss the real work that Jesus is

undertaking. And in doing so, Jesus remains this 'now you see it, now you don't' kind of person for us.

This type of thing also occurred as Jesus ministered and taught during His time here on earth. He was unlike anything that they had encountered before. In general, as we study the scriptures, we see that Jesus is never totally forthcoming in revealing all of who He is. He invites many to simply come and see. For many, they do come and see, much like Andrew and Peter, much like Philip and eventually Nathanael. But in other ways and for many people then and even now, Jesus remains a mystery. He performs amazing and life-changing miracles and then tells the healed person not to tell anyone. And at other times, Jesus heals someone in front a huge crowd or feeds thousands and thousands with two fish and five loaves. He is at times fully "now you see it" and at other times He remains "now you don't".

Again, this is sometimes the reality of our faith as well. It is at times a "now you see it, now you don't" type of faith. But we are called to more. Jesus expects us to be more. We are called to be sold out, to be fully engaged in our faith, willing to step outside of our comfort zones to see what Jesus might do. The invitation to us is the same as it was to Philip and Nathanael. Jesus also invites us to "come and see". When we do, Jesus will say to us what He said to Nathanael, "*You will see greater things than these*". This promise is true for us as well.

As we seek to grow in our faith, our faith will become more of a “now you see it” type of faith than a “now you don’t” type of faith. As we become more fully committed followers of Christ, our faith will become more and more of our focus. Other will see Christ in us and through us on a more regular basis. As we seek to live out our faith in all we say and do, we will experience Christ in new and amazing ways. *“You will see greater things than these”*. May this become our reality as we journey ever closer to Jesus, the foundation of our faith. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When have you felt called to “come and see” Jesus a bit closer or better?
When you have responded, how has your faith grown?
- 2) In what ways do you want to know Jesus more? Spend some time in prayer asking God to reveal these aspects of Jesus to you.
- 3) How are you being called or lead to serve God this week that would make your faith more of a “now you see it” kind of faith?