

Haydenville Congregational Church

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1 Samuel 3:1-10

John 1:43-51

“Can anything good come out of Haydenville?”

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

Today’s Scripture reading from the Book of John is about the time Jesus called Philip and Nathanael as his disciples. Philip seems to have chosen to follow Jesus without hesitation. Jesus said, “Follow me” and it appears that Philip did just that. That was easy, as they say on the Staples commercial....that was easy. Jesus says “follow me” and Philip does!

Then there is Nathanael—he is not won over so easily.

Philip reaches out to Nathanael saying: “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” (Notice Mary gets no billing at all in that description—seems to me she carried Jesus and delivered him in a challenging setting.)

Anyway, that is Philip’s description of Jesus to Nathanael. A thumbnail sketch really, like Philip is speaking to Nathanael in short-hand—Hey, THE ONE we were told was coming is here. The one the prophets spoke of has arrived! He is Jesus from Nazareth.”

But Nathanael is reluctant to leave work, maybe he has a busy schedule, he does not want to go see some preacher who is filling his friend’s head with who knows what nonsense. Nathanael is not only skeptical he is downright dismissive AND his prejudices get the best of him....he is not impressed by Philip’s invoking the prophets of old or referencing Moses. Instead Nathanael focuses on Jesus’ questionable hometown and says, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

It is a great line and a great moment. Nathanael misses the significance of WHO Jesus is and focuses instead on WHERE Jesus is from. It is like hearing about Barack Obama—all his gifts, talents and strengths—and saying, “Can anything good come out of Kenya, Indonesia and Hawaii?”

Nathanael’s skepticism was rooted in the fact that Nazareth was a backwater, an insignificant place up in the Galilee region of ancient Israel—65 miles north of Jerusalem the seat of power and authority. Can anything good come out of a small, rural, unimportant, backwater place like Nazareth?

Well that’s a good question.

Can anything good come out of a small, rural, unimportant backwater place like Haydenville? We’ll consider that later.

Philip persists, “Come and see” he tells Nathanael...see for yourself. And Nathanael does. And then, when Jesus sees Nathanael coming toward him, he says, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

With that, Nathanael’s life is changed forever.

Notice what changes Nathanael’s life isn’t Philip’s persuasive description of Jesus, and it isn’t Nathanael’s observation of Jesus. **It is not what Nathanael sees about Jesus that changes things, but what Jesus sees about Nathanael.**

Jesus sees Nathanael, and that touches and changes Nathanael’s life.

Jesus believes in Nathanael, has called Nathanael to be his disciple, and recognizes Nathanael as an honorable person.

The Philip-Nathanael-Jesus encounter is instructive for us.

It is important for us to know that just as Jesus saw the essence of Nathanael, the goodness, the core of Nathanael as Nathanael approached him, Jesus sees us—our essence, our goodness, and our core as well. Jesus saw and believed in Nathanael and Jesus sees and believes in us. **As Christians, we spend a lot of time celebrating our faith in God. Today I want us to celebrate God’s faith in us.**

For God, as manifest in Jesus, believed in humanity enough to call ordinary people and give them work to do in his name.

God, as manifest in Jesus, believed in ordinary mortals like you and me enough to call folk like us and involve us in the very work of God.

Jesus will allow Philip, Nathanael and the other ten disciples to minister in his name, to travel and preach in his name, to touch people with their hands and heal people in his name. People will do the work of God in Jesus' name.

We are told in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the Book of Genesis, that humankind was made in the image of God. But what is more radical than that—more radical than being made in the **image** of God—is that human beings were created to be about the **business** of God. We don't just share God's image, God has given us a share in God's work. God is the great delegator. And God has delegated God's work, to be done on this good earth, to us.

I have heard in workshops on leadership that one of the greatest strengths of a leader is to be able to trust her or his followers and delegate real, meaningful and important work to them. Well, God must have enormous trust in us because God gives, from the very beginning, great work—real, meaningful, and important work—for us to do.

God is the great delegator.

Not only are we made in the image of God, not only are we representatives of God, but we are given responsibility for the work of God.

This thought is articulated by Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians, Chapter 5, Paul says, "God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself...entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ. Since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

God has not only created us, but given us godly work to do. We are ambassadors for Christ, carrying on the work of God.

And so when we wonder, can anything good come out of rural, backwater, unimportant Haydenville far from the seats of power in Boston and New York...can anything good come out of insignificant Haydenville? The answer must be a resounding, emphatic, thunderous YES because God has given us godly work to do. God the great delegator has called us like God called Samuel, like Jesus called Philip, like Philip called Nathanael, God the great delegator has called us, lowly unimportant us in Haydenville, to do God's work. Something good better come out of Haydenville because God the great delegator has called us to do God's work.

Today we recognize, we remember that we have all been anointed delegates by God to do God's work on this earthly plane. And we are grateful for and inspired by God's delegates who have gone before us and done the work for justice that they believed God called them to do.

The litany we shared at the beginning of our worship service today named some of those who heard God call, understood that God was the great delegator, and recognized that they must respond and do God's work with their own voices and hands.

We remember and honor Rosa Parks, Ralph Abernathy and Fannie Lou Hamer. We remember and honor Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin and James Meredith. We remember and honor Arthur Lelyveld, James Reeb and Coretta Scott King. And we remember and honor Martin Luther King Jr. a visionary, prophetic, brave and inspired man of God... They were all good and faithful servants, God's loyal delegates, doing the work God called them to do.

And today, two days before the Inauguration of Barack Obama, we lift up Martin King's words and witness as we anticipate Barack Obama's powerful leadership as our President.

Today, as the stars align in the heavens, we lift up Martin King's courageous, inspiring and honorable leadership, as we anticipate Barack Obama's dedication to justice, compassion and peace.

Today, as we celebrate the life of Martin Luther King and anticipate the Inauguration of Barack Obama we pause to recognize that Martin King did the work he believed he was called to do, And Barack Obama is doing the work he believes he has been called to do... Today, we pause to recognize that both King and Obama are men of faith, both called by God, both given work to do by the great delegator, both rooted in the Christian church, both shaped by community, both leaders despite the odds stacked against them, both targeted by racism, both brave enough to speak truth to power, both inspiring orators, both filled with the spirit.

We lift and honor their memories and are grateful for their leadership.

And yet, in the same breath let us recognize that is it not just famous and powerful leaders who are called to do the work of God, called to stand for justice, create peace, combat racism, dismantle classism, confront heterosexism, fight oppression,

bring about reconciliation, and embrace compassion. God, the great delegator has called each one of us to engage in godly work as well.

Something good must come out of Haydenville because God did not delegate God's work just to high profile leaders in Atlanta or Washington. God did not say everything important comes out of Jerusalem or New York. God did not anoint a few and count on the rest to be trustworthy followers; God made us in God's image and delegated godly work to be done by our hands.

We are grateful for powerful, honorable men and women of integrity who lead with vision and strength.

AND we recognize the continuing work to break down barriers, to love our neighbor, to share wealth and care for the poor, to create an inbreaking of fairness and justice, we recognize that this work has been delegated to each one of us.

Something good must come out of Haydenville because powerful leaders need partners and comrades who commune with God and do God's work.

I am grateful for Martin Luther King and I celebrate his work and his witness on this weekend that commemorates his life. And I am grateful for Barack Obama and I celebrate his audacity and his vision on this weekend before his inauguration.

And I am grateful to all of you.

Because I found here among you that something good can and has come out of Haydenville. With your lives, your commitment, your words and your actions YOU have done the work God has delegated to you...

YOU have made a warm, inclusive, open and affirming church that welcomes everyone

YOU have traveled to New Orleans to rebuild homes after the hurricane

YOU have made and served meals to our homeless brothers and sisters in Northampton

YOU have given huge amounts of money to Blankets for Hope, Tools for Change, Neighbors in Need, the Heifer Project, the Sunrise Foundation, the Hilltown Pantry, the family in Amherst who lost their son, the Macedonia Church of God that was burned

YOU have ministered to each other through calls and visits and Angel Take-out

YOU have vigiled against racism and hate speech

YOU have marched for LGBT rights and dignity

YOU have participated in the Crop Walk

YOU have visited inmates and brought them hope

YOU have gathered to understand classism and what can be done to break its hold on society

YOU have worked in the community on our Blue Moon Sundays

YOU have given material aid to Grove Street Inn and Safe Passage.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Can anything good come out of Atlanta?

Can anything good come out of Chicago?

YES!!!! To all, praise God!

And can anything good come out of Haydenville?

Good can come out of Haydenville.

Good has come out of Haydenville

And good will continue to come out of Haydenville...as we continue to do the work for equality, freedom, peace and justice that God, the great delegator, has placed in our hands.

Amen.