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A lot happens in the Gospel of John. The narrator introduces Jesus as the Word spoken by God at the beginning of time in John 1:1, and the narrator has steadily re-focused the story on smaller and smaller vignettes until we arrive here—to a simple scene at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when he is calling his disciples.

In our scene, Jesus travels to Galilee with Philip at the beginning of his public ministry. As they travel, they encounter another fellow named Nathaniel. Nathaniel is a bit of a cynic and makes a joke about how terrible Jesus' hometown is and how unlikely that anything good would come from there. His cynicism was no match for God's grace, and, after Nathaniel encounters Jesus, something in him clicks, and Nathaniel exclaims for all the world that Jesus is the Son of God and the King of Israel. The entire drama is just a few sentences.

Who here hasn't been a Nathaniel—cynical and closed off from God at one time or another. I certainly have, and I imagine you have too. What astounds me about this story is the moment that Nathaniel transforms from derision to belief. What clicked for Nathaniel, that he was able to recognize the face of God? How does God enter into a story between one second and the next? I have a hunch that his transformation had something to do with Nathaniel first being known by God. Jesus recognizes Nathaniel and then Nathaniel recognizes Jesus. There's a sense in which God is always seeking us out, even when we're not in a good place to receive that kind of attention. There are so many things, big and small, in this life that keep us from seeing the face of God. Something in our DNA causes a kind of God blindness.

I believe that the human capacity to ignore God when God is standing right in front of us is vast. Who among us has failed to see the face of God in a neighbor or a stranger? Who among us has failed to see the face of God in the natural world? We have a God-blind spot, as any cursory glance at the newspapers will confirm.

I'm particularly aware of the ways in which our corporate blindness have impacted the trajectory of history in our country. Tomorrow, many of our brothers and sisters will observe a day set aside to commemorate The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. who had the audacity to insist that the face of God was present in every person in our nation. Who had the gall to call religious people to account for the horrible scar that slavery and its pernicious child Jim Crow has left on our citizenry? Our willingness to ignore the divine grace right in front of us knows no bounds, and the consequences of that blindness can wreak havoc on our world. We pray that God will show God's face to us, even when we work so hard not to see.

And yet, there is grace for Nathaniel. There is grace for us. Nathaniel does finally recognize God standing right in front of him. We do finally recognize God standing right in front of us.

After the Midweek Mass on Thursday, a young woman strolled into St. Mark's. The service was over, so I assumed she was there to ask for some kind of aid. I was wrong, as it turns out. She wanted to see the sanctuary. As I was learning more about her story, it came up that she was Episcopalian, a junior in college in Tennessee, and was visiting a good friend in Milwaukee over the winter break. They had just seen a movie at the Downer theater, and she decided to come over after she noticed our door open. I sat and chatted with her about her hopes and dreams for the future for about 20 minutes. In that twenty minutes, she shared that she has been considering going to seminary after college and was hoping to seek ordination to the priesthood.

After a long day at work—emails and phone calls and what have you—I found her fire and optimism to be refreshing and beautiful. At the ripe old age of 21, she had a spirit and a love of the Lord that I found utterly compelling. I felt some of my burdens lifted by the chance encounter with this young Christian woman. As she talked about her future, I could tell that this was a woman who had seen the face of God and wanted to follow. The power in her testimony stayed with me, and I'm grateful that she felt comfortable sharing her Nathaniel moment.

Seeing the face of God doesn't mean you need to go study theology, by the way. That's just where her story happened to lead.

I wonder where yours is leading. When you feel a moment of grace—when any cynicism falls away and you can feel the presence of the Son of God—how do you choose to follow? What is your response? Can you think of a time when the face of God was right in front of you—when you felt absolutely recognized, and you couldn't help recognize God in return? It might be in the great rites of the church—Eucharist, Baptism, Healing. Or maybe it was outside these walls with a friend or in the solitude of a long walk. When was your Nathaniel moment?

It's been my experience that Nathaniel moments aren't just one-off occurrences. The Christian life is a marathon and not a sprint. There may be times in your life where the face of God seems so clear and right in front of you. There may be other times where you roll your eyes and say, with Nathaniel, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Faith and doubt have been good friends in the Christians tradition for as long as there has BEEN a Christian tradition.

These Nathaniel moments will be for us the antidote to our God-blindness. These moments will allow us to see, then to follow Jesus, then to act. And perhaps they can safeguard us from some of the more heinous acts of which we're capable when we choose not to see God. Something clicked for Nathaniel that shook him out of his denial—that allowed him to see God face to face.

May God likewise shake up our lives and shake up our church and shake up our nation so that something will click for us, and we will see that God has been with us all along. Amen.