

**May I speak in the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” As we heard in our Gospel reading this morning, Nathanael has some opinions and some assumptions, about Nazareth.

I am sure that we are all guilty from time to time of making assumptions?

“I’ve seen his type before; he’ll never change.”

“She’s always so negative; I know what she will say.”

“He won’t understand; he never does.”

“It’s always been like that; it will never get any better.”

“Nothing good can come of that situation.”

People of faith, people like Nathanael, people like you and me, make these and all sorts of other assumptions everyday.

Sometimes our assumptions are about other people; how they will behave, what they will say, what we can expect, what they think or believe.

Other times we look at particular situations, the state of the economy or the church, a teenager trying to grow up and we declare it hopeless. We are sure that nothing good can come out of that situation.

Then there are those times we look at ourselves, or a part of our life - perhaps a secret we have carried for years, the illness we face, an addiction we hide, the hurts we have caused others, and we say it will never get any better. How can anything good come out of this? We may or may not speak our assumptions out loud but they run through our minds and influence what we do.

We all know what happens when we make assumptions?

Sadly, the assumptions we make can destroy relationships, love, and life.

When we think we know more than really do, assumptions act as limitations. They narrow our vision. They close off the possibility of change and growth. Our assumptions deny the possibility of reconciliation, healing, a different way of being, or a new life. Ultimately, they impoverish our faith and leave little room for God to come into our lives.

It is probably no coincidence that Nathanael is sitting under a fig tree when he makes his comment. It was the fig tree that gave Adam and Eve the leaves behind which they hid from God and themselves. It is the fig tree that Jesus will later curse for producing no fruit, no signs of life.

Assumptions can become our hiding places. They are not fruitful. They keep us from engaging life, ourselves, each other, and God at a deeper level.

Nathanael doesn't doubt that God will fulfill the Old Testament promises. He isn't surprised by and doesn't even question that Philip could have found the one about "whom Moses in the law and the prophets spoke." His shock and disbelief was that this could come out of Nazareth. Nathanael had as much faith as any other devout Jew, but Nazareth? To his mind, there was simply no way that anything good could come out of Nazareth?

In a sense, we all have our Nazareths. We all have Nazareth assumptions which we think are about other people, particular circumstances, or even parts of our lives. In reality, however, these assumptions are often about us - our fears, our prejudices, our guilt, our losses, our wounds. We take our past experiences, real or imagined, and project them onto another person or situation. Assumptions can keep life shallow and superficial. If we assume, then we do not have to risk a deeper knowing and being known.

At the deepest level our Nazareths are about our understanding of God. We just can't see how anything good can come out of Nazareth. We cannot believe that God could be present, active, and revealed in Nazareth whether it be another person, a relationship or situation, or our own life. It's so hard to see life in the midst of death, hope in places of despair, and light in the midst of darkness. It's sometimes easier to assume. For us, Nazareth is a kind of blind spot.

For God, however, Nazareth is the place of God's self-revelation.

To us, with our worldly eyes, it seems unimaginable that God should come to our metaphorical Nazareths. Whether it is the town, a person, or a situation, Nazareth seems too ordinary or mundane. Shouldn't the person or place of God's coming be more deserving, special, acceptable, holy, better behaved, likable, more regular at church, someone who prays more, better dressed?

But, God does not allow himself to be limited by our assumptions. For every Nazareth there is an invitation to "come and see." For every assumption we make there is a deeper truth to be discovered, a new relationship to be experienced, and a new richness of life to be found. Our Nazareths can also become the place of God's epiphany.

Again and again, Jesus enters into the Nazareths of our life and calls us out from under the fig tree. Whenever we leave the fig tree we open ourselves to see God present and at work in the most unexpected places and people. As we let go of our assumptions our eyes are opened to the wonder of God's love and presence with us.

The last place we would have thought that possible is the first place God chooses. Our salvation and healing happen where we thought nothing good could happen. Reconciliation and love are revealed in relationships we were certain nothing good could come from. The seemingly hopeless situations of life begins to bear fruit. Words of forgiveness and compassion are spoken by people we were sure could never say such things.

We too are invited to "Come and see."

And for that, thanks be to God. Amen.