

011424 Sermon **"Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?"** John 1:43-51

1. Randy was unsure about his choice of clothes for church so he sought some counsel from his wife. He asked, "Do you think I should change?" She took advantage of the opportunity and replied, "It depends—are you talking about changing your shirt or making a wholesale change as a human being?"

United Methodists talk about three kinds of grace we experience in our life with God: prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Prevenient grace is grace before we knew we needed it. Grace reaches out to us. That's why we baptize infants before they cognitively understand the story of Jesus, before they can affirm their own faith. That's why we believe in an open table. God's grace is always present, abundant, and plentiful.

Through justifying grace, we find pardon for our sin. Jesus Christ has made possible this forgiveness of sin, and so we bind ourselves to him. So, not only do we confess Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord, but we also seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to transform our lives according to His Word.

Sanctifying grace is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit that changes us so that our lives are increasingly conformed to the mind of Christ. John Wesley called this lifelong process sanctification or becoming "perfected in love." Wesley described as a heart "habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor" and as "having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked."

For sure, the reason you come to church is not to maintain membership, but to believe that Jesus is in charge of your life and to live a different life according to His Word. Apostle John wrote the reason for writing the Gospel in John 20:31, "But these are written so that you may come to believe that

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

2. In the scripture reading given to us today, Chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, Nathanael appears. Nathanael has the distinction of being the first person to confess belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Most biblical scholars believe Nathanael and Bartholomew were one and the same. The name Bartholomew is a family designation, meaning "son of Tolmai," which implies that he had another name. Nathanael means "gift of God" or "giver of God." The Gospel of John describes Nathanael's call by Philip. The two disciples may have been friends, for Nathanael was brought by Philip to Jesus. When Nathanael accepted Jesus' call, he became his disciple.

Philip went to Nathanael and said, ""We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth." At first, Nathanael was skeptical about the idea of a Messiah from Nazareth. He scoffed at Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

The issue is the demeaning attitude toward Nazareth, a countryside. Nazareth was a small town in Galilee. Being so small, and not adjacent to major cities, it was the last place one would expect anything great, anything good, or anything interesting to happen. Thus, people at the time used the demeaning expression, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

If you look at the Old and New Testaments, the way God works is truly unique. For example, according to Deuteronomy chapter 7, do you know why God chose the Israelites? Deuteronomy 7:7-8 says, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you are the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from

the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh, King of Egypt."

According to this passage, initially God didn't choose the People of Israel because of any merit in them at all. It wasn't because of them. It was because of God. God's grace! This love originated with God.

This is the same for you and everyone who knows God. The reality is that you know God. You know His love because of His love. Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, so that no one can boast."

As you meditate on today's Bible verses, change your thinking just a little. Can anything good come from Nazareth? Yes! Nazareth is a small town and a really unremarkable place. However, because of Jesus, He can work wonders even in Nazareth. Your difficult moments can be different if you are with Jesus of Nazareth. Your worries will change into prayers. It allows me to enjoy and appreciate the moment.

3.The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." It means that God's grace toward you is already sufficient, abundant, and overflowing. Do you believe this? He didn't say, "I will give you more abundantly in the future! Hang in there!" It's that He's already given you enough! Do you believe this? Or would you say, "Pastor, I think it's a little lacking now..."

We are surprisingly easily dulled by what we have already received. When we possess things that others envy, once we have them, we take them for granted. Some people live healthier than others. Of course, you work hard on your own, but there is definitely something given. Some people live in a

more prosperous environment than others. Some people have greater energy and passion than others, and some live smarter than others. If you are grateful for everything God has entrusted to you, especially if you are a follower of Christ from Nazareth, you are living a good life of faith!

We live a very relative life. But, realizing that God's grace toward him was already abundant and absolute, Paul no longer fell into a sense of self-doubt, nor was he intoxicated with a sense of useless superiority. Rather, he was living in anticipation of God, who would build strength through his weaknesses!

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, the fact that the Messiah came from Nazareth was a surprise. All that promise, all that hope, all that bright assuredness hung on a cross to die. It seemed so sad. It seemed so hopeless. And yet there is still the promise: the promise to save us from the power of sin and death, the promise to give us the power to become children of God, and the promise to be with us until the end of the world! Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.