

John 1:4-51

First impressions can be very important. When interviewing for a job, your potential employer has probably sized you up within moments of meeting you. If a young man wants a second date with a young lady, he will need to, on their first date, put his best foot forward. Often people have formed impressions of us even before they've met us. "Your reputation precedes you," can be a compliment; but not always—not when the information and gossip spread about someone is on the negative side.

Even before Nathanael met Jesus he did not think much of Him. Philip was excited. He could hardly contain himself. "We have found Him of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote"—the Messiah! He couldn't wait for Nathanael to meet Him. But Nathanael could have waited all day. He was in no hurry to meet this Jesus character. He was skeptical. Nathanael had already decided, before even shaking His hand, that Jesus of Nazareth was nothing to get too pumped up over.

The mistake Philip made was in telling Nathanael where Jesus was from. He might have had his attention at first, but when he said, "Jesus...of Nazareth," at that point he lost him. "Nazareth? Nazareth! Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael was not impressed. For one thing Nazareth was a town of questionable reputation. For another, there was no mention of it anywhere in the Scriptures. Nothing was ever said, either by Moses, David, or any of the Prophets, about the Messiah coming out of Nazareth.

Perhaps the same thing can be said about Augusta. Now Augusta, Georgia—champions come out of it. Tiger Woods, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicholas—these and many other champion golfers come out of Augusta, Georgia as winners of the Master's Tournament. But Augusta, Missouri? Oh our wineries are putting out some good wine, but people far and wide would say, "Can anything good come out of Augusta?" Our congregation has been here 150 years, and yet most Lutherans around the country have never heard of us. "Augusta? Can anything good come out of Augusta?"

Possibly the best response to such a question is what Philip said to Nathanael: "Come and see." No argument from his lips; no begging and pleading either; just, "Come and see." That needs to be our response as well. Not everyone shares your enthusiasm for the church. Not everyone knows what you know and believes what you believe. There may be a Nathanael in your life whose impression of Christ Lutheran Church in Augusta, Missouri is not good. For whatever reason, this friend or loved one of yours is not at all interested in what happens here in Augusta, Missouri on Sunday mornings. Should we be angered by that? Should it bother us? Should we argue with them about why they need to come to church with us? Should we get down on our knees and beg and plead? Not Philip..."Come and see;" that's all he said.

Nathanael may not have been impressed before he met Jesus, but he was after. "I saw you," Jesus told him, "Under the fig tree"—and that was enough for him. "Rabbi," Nathanael exclaimed, "You are the Son of God!" It's not that Nathanael was impressed with Jesus' eyesight; that He could see him way out under the fig tree. But that fig tree is where Nathanael would have been in prayer. Under the fig tree is where Nathanael would have spent time reading the Scriptures and meditating; where his secret thoughts would have been known only to God. The fig tree...when Jesus told him, "I saw you there," his

impression quickly changed. Now he would answer his own question: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” “Absolutely yes! The Messiah did! The Savior of the world came out of Nazareth!”

That same Messiah, each and every Sunday morning, comes out of Augusta. We may not have huge crowds gather here. We may not be very impressive to the world. No champion golfer ever came out of Augusta, Missouri, but your Champion—He who fought the battle against sin, death, and hell for you, and won—comes out of this very place in the preaching and teaching of His Word and the giving of His Sacraments.

“Can anything good come out of Augusta?” “Come and see.” Bring your children to Holy Baptism; bring them with you to church faithfully, and just watch as Jesus gives them faith and nurtures them into wonderful Christian people. “Can anything good come out of Augusta?” “Come and see.” Come and hear the words of your Savior week after week. Come to Bible Class and be immersed in the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Come up to God’s altar faithfully to receive the Lord’s body and blood—and see your life empowered by the Word of God. See God at work in you and through you. See your confidence, and joy, and peace, and hope, and faith grow like never before. “Can anything good come out of Augusta?” “Come and see.” Come out to that cemetery and look at the names of the men, and women, and children who died in the Faith. In recent memory...Edna, and Robert, and Vernon, and Olga, and Mary Katherine...and they all said as they were dying, “Absolutely yes! Out of Augusta came my Savior for me. In His Word I have put my trust.” And each one of them, along with others before them, died in the joy of the Lord.

It doesn’t say, but I can imagine that Nathanael was ashamed of himself after meeting Jesus. He had doubted the words of Philip. He had questioned the authenticity of Jesus. Afterwards, in guilt, he may have thought, “Can anything good come out of Nathanael?” “Jesus is the Son of God as Philip told me. He is the pure and holy One, and I am nothing but a wretched, doubting, judgmental sinner. Can anything good come out of me?”

Are those your thoughts as well? Whether you’re from Augusta, or Washington, Marthasville, or Defiance, or places far away, do you lay your head down on your pillow at night and with guilt say, “Can anything good come out of me?” We are sinners, you and I. Nothing good dwells in our flesh. Rather, we are filled with unholy thoughts. Our mouths are filled with deceit and lies, with cursing and angry words; our hearts with malice and envy, with jealousy and hatred, with lust and pride. Can anything good come out of such sinful people as we are?

Absolutely yes! Jesus comes out of you just as He came out of Nathanael. He became one of the Twelve, known as Bartholomew, an Apostle. He became a witness of the Risen Savior. He was martyred for confessing his faith in Jesus. He who came out of Nazareth also, in time, came out of Nathanael as he lived for the rest of his life, a servant of Jesus.

That’s why Jesus came out of Nazareth in the first place. He came out for you, friend. He came out to live a holy life and give it to you in your baptism. He came out to be led to a lonely cross and die there for you. He came out of Nazareth so that here in Augusta Jesus comes to you in Word and Sacrament and gives you faith, forgiveness, and eternal life. Jesus came out of Nazareth so that He can today come out of you; so that His name is on your lips; so that His peace is in your heart.

You and I may be insignificant to the world. “You’re from where? Augusta, Missouri? What good thing ever came out of there?” You did, my friend. You, a dear and precious child of God. You who are forgiven of all your sins by Jesus’ blood. You, even better than good-tasting wine—you come out of Augusta because Jesus comes out of His preached Word here for you. Amen.