

January 15, 2012
Psalm 139 1-6, 13-18
John 1:35-51

Anything good?

I like reading the Sunday paper. It's one of my favorite things to do on the weekend. I like picking up that heavy bundle and going through all the different sections. The sports, the world news, the opinions, the coupons, the homes for sale, the weekly circulars. And oh, yes, the Parade Magazine. Last week in the Parade magazine, there was an article that caught my attention. It was about Daniel Radcliff. Now in case you have been hiding under a rock for the past 11 years, you know who Daniel Radcliff. He is... he's Harry Potter. There was an interview with him in there; and it covered everything an interview should cover. It went over movies and love and I was only half reading it when they started talking about faith. Then I started paying attention. Parade magazine said to Daniel in the interview, "Your father is Protestant and your mother is Jewish. Were you raised in a particular religion?" Now Daniel's answer was very interesting. Listen to what he said: "My dad believes in God, I think. I'm not sure if my mom does. I don't. I have a problem with religion or anything that says, 'We have all the answers,'

because there's no such thing as 'the answers.' We're complex. We change our minds on issues all the time. Religion leaves no room for human complexity."

That interview was a reality check. It made me remember that in the church we talk about God as if everyone understands and agrees with us. But the reality is lots of people today including our cultural icons, are skeptical of religion. They are skeptical when it comes to God. And they are skeptical when it comes to the church. They are skeptical when it comes to anything having to do with faith. They just aren't sure about it and truthfully, they'd rather have nothing to do with it. Maybe it's because of all the bad press. Maybe because they had a bad experience. Maybe for all its talk about goodness and truth, it seems too good to be true. And in this age of instant information, people have seen too much. They've heard too much. They know too much. And there is too much out there that saying that religion is bad. That the church isn't a place to go with your questions. The church isn't a place with your complexities. The church isn't the place to go to feel welcomed. It's too worried about itself to be worried about anyone else. It's too worried about being right

rather than doing right. It's too afraid of the world to tell the world not to be afraid. So, people are skeptical of everything about the church.

The world is now a place full of skeptics. It's full of questions. It's going to call religion out on things that don't make sense. Like why the church would be afraid of science and evolution. Or why the church would ban interracial couples. Or why the church would burn the Quran. If the church is going to be that unloving when they say they are about love, if Christians are going to be that ungracious when they say they are about grace, then the world is going to be skeptical of us. They won't believe us when we say God so loves the world. They won't believe us when we say that we believe in forgiveness. They won't believe us when we say we've got good news for them. They won't believe that anything good come from the church. Can anything good come out of all that worshipping and praying? Can anything good come from all that confessing and testifying? Can anything good come from all that talk about Jesus? Can anything good come out of the church?

The world is full of skeptics. It's full of people who roll their eyes. It's full of people who sigh and say 'yeah, right.' It's full of people who

have heard it all before and have grown a little cynical. People just like Nathanael in our reading from the gospel of John. Who knows you can't believe everything you hear. And that you are pretty naïve if you do. And sure he sure hates to be negative, but you've got to question everything nowadays. So when Philip comes and tells him that they've found a great teacher, someone who might be the messiah in fact, he is skeptical. So you want me to drop everything and follow a wandering preacher? It sounds sketchy. You can't trust Messiahs, they tend to have a God complex. And he comes from Nazareth. Nazareth?! Not Princeton or Yale or Harvard? Nazareth? Seriously? Can anything good come out from Nazareth?"

Nathanael is a skeptic. He is one of those people who has seen too much and heard too much. He isn't able to believe in anything. He knows too much. He knows, everyone knows, that nothing good can come from religion. Nothing good can come from having faith. It's all a bunch of fairy tales and lies. Don't waste your time. Do you know a Nathanael? There are lots Nathanaels in the world today. There are lots of people who have seen too much and know too much and can't believe in

anything good. They know how the world works. They can make a pretty good guess about the type of people that come from Las Vegas. And those folks who are from Washington DC. And is there anything good that can come out of Detroit? Or Dallas? Or Seattle? Or Hazard KY? Or North Lexington. I mean, have you been to North Lexington? At night? There are lots of Nathanaels who can tell you all about people. No matter what Martin Luther King Jr says. They know all about black people and Hispanic people. And poor people and rich people. And old people and young people. They can tell you all about Yankees and Southerners. And they have their suspicions about those people from the Midwest. There's not much good to be had anywhere.

The world is full of Nathanaels. It's full of people who have seen too much and heard too much. People who have been scarred and wounded. People who have seen the worst in human beings and find it hard to believe there is anything good out there. Who can't even believe in any goodness. They can't believe that God is good or that the church is good. That is the sad truth. There are more and more people who believe that the church isn't good. That it doesn't work for good or act for good.

That it doesn't care much about good in the world around it. I don't think we realize that. I don't think we realize that as Christians our lives are the only gospel some people will ever read. Lots of people are waiting and wondering, can anything good come out of the church?

There are lots of Nathanaels out there. And they are waiting for something good. They are waiting for God. And I think sometimes in the church we are too. We are just as much Nathanaels as anyone else. In the church we let ourselves slip into cynicism and negativity. We feel skeptical that God can do any good in the world. We feel skeptical about our beliefs. We don't let ourselves feel passionate about our faith.

Because we see too much and hear too much and know too much.

Things aren't good in our lives and we aren't sure God can do much about it. Things aren't good because the family grudge is alive and well.

Things aren't good because alcohol addiction is lurking outside the door.

Things aren't good at work with all the pressure and the sniping. We feel criticized all the time. We don't pray like we should. We say things we

don't mean. Is there anything good that can come out of us? Is there anything good that can come from our hearts and our spirits and our

mouths? Is there anything good in us? By the grace of God, yes there is. Here is place where we can start over. Here is place where we can be forgiven. Here is a place where we can remember who we are. We are God's beloved. This place has power. And this place is where God transforms us. Something very good comes out of this place. Something we want everyone to come and see.

Come and see, that's the invitation from the scripture today. That's our invitation as the church to a world full of Nathanaels. Because there is something good here, isn't there? Something very good. Something that heals us and restores us. Something that redeems us. Something good. Something that people need to come and see. That's what Philip says to Nathanael. Come and see. Philip knows Nathanael needs to meet Jesus. Come and see. Philip has seen and heard Jesus and he knows this is something very good. Come and see. No matter how skeptical or cynical Nathanael is, Philip knows Nathanael needs to come and see and hear and know for himself. There is goodness here. This is where you will find what is good. Come and see.

Who has been a Philip in your life? Who invited you to find goodness?

Who showed you the place to meet Jesus? Who passed on their excitement, their warmth, their love? Who shared with you what it meant to believe? Who invited you see what was good and positive?

Who showed you that you had an important part in God's creation? Who was your Philip? (post-its)

Come and see, says Philip. Come and meet Jesus. Come and know what is good. That's what the church is about. We want people to come and meet the one who knows us and sees us and loves us no matter where we are from. Whether it's from under a fig tree or under the bridge in a cardboard box or under the roof of a nice house. Jesus knows who we are. He sees us and hears us and knows what we've been through. He knows our doubts and our questions. He knows what we wrestle with. He knows we want more than words. We want to see and hear and feel something good. The kind of good that reaches from the tips of fingers all the way down into our deepest insides. The kind of good that takes all our mistakes and our hurts and our failures to the cross. The kind of

good that overcomes everything bad by the power of love. The kind of good that we want people to come and see.

We may be the only gospel that people ever read. We may be the Philip for one of the Nathanaels out there. And we are here because we are a place where people can find something good. And we want people to come and see something they can believe in. We want people to come and meet this Savior of ours. We want them to find that this place is a place of forgiveness and grace. And because of God's love for us in Jesus Christ, something good can come out of here. Something good can grow in the garden and go home in a kid's backpack. Something good can embrace us in centering prayer and be colored with crayons in Sunday school. Something good can find us caroling at the Midway Apts and taking a meal to a friend. The good of loving others for the sake of one who loved us. May our lives be the gospel, the good news that the world needs to hear and see and know.