

January 14, 2018

Epiphany 2-B John 1:43-51

“If I Could Just See God ...”

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Have you ever said, or thought, these words? “If I could just see God ...” For people of faith – for people like us who can only believe and trust in God – what a tremendous boost and uplift for our souls it would be! If we could just see God!

Sherry has expressed that hope. “If I could just see God,” she thinks to herself often. She’s 28, a life-long churchgoer. But none of her friends go to church, or even believe in God. Sherry just lost her job. Her boyfriend broke up with her. She’s running out of money, and she’s running low on faith, too. She prays to God every night, but Sherry can’t help wondering if anybody’s listening, if her God is real. “If I could just see God ...”

Johnny has muttered those words, too. He’s in his 80’s, and is all alone. His wife died. No kids, no close relatives. Johnny’s sight is gone, his health has declined, and he can’t live by himself anymore. He’s in a nursing home, and nobody but his pastor ever visits him. Johnny tells his pastor, “I don’t understand why God is keeping me here. I’m sad and scared and depressed every day. I just want to go home and be with the Lord. If I could just see God ...”

Little Olivia has said those same words. She’s 4. She goes to church with Mom and Dad. She loves Sunday School, and Children’s Church. “We sing songs to God. We pray to God. I know God is in my heart. But when am I going to see God?” Olivia wants to know. “If I could just see God ...”

Have you ever said those words, or thought that way? If I could just see God, my faith would be confirmed, my belief would finally be something tangible. When I’m having a

really tough spiritual day, when the temptations of the world are too much for me, when the hardships of my life are unbearable, to just see God would make it all so much better.

If we could see God, faith would be stronger, devotion to him more intense. Doubts would be diminished, and our Christian walk so much more joyful and dynamic.

“If I could just see God ...”

Nathanael, in our Bible story, got to see God. He’s invited to meet Jesus, when the Lord was just starting his public ministry. After his baptism, Jesus is starting to teach, preach, and do miracles. He begins gathering disciples. He recruits Philip, and then we hear in the Gospel story how Philip goes and tells his friend Nathanael about Jesus, setting the pattern for Christians like us to follow. Go and tell your friends about Jesus. Philip does just that. But Nathanael isn’t too sure he believes that Jesus of Nazareth is really the promised Messiah.

Then Jesus does a little miracle. He demonstrates divine knowledge and omniscience. He says, “Hey, Nathanael, I saw you when you were talking to Philip under that fig tree.” And there’s no way a normal human being could have seen that. Nathanael is immediately won over. “Rabbi,” he exclaims, “you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Nathanael speaks in the highest terms he can come up with. He ascribes divinity to Jesus. Nathanael is a believer!

And then Jesus gives him an amazing promise. “You believed because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the tree’? You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

So Nathanael not only gets to meet Jesus, and see the Son of God with his own eyes. Jesus' amazing promise also makes it clear that when you see Jesus, you're seeing God. Jesus came to earth as God in the flesh. Jesus came to reveal God to human beings, to demonstrate visibly and audibly who God is, what God cares about, how much God loves human beings – even sinful human beings like us. See Jesus, see God!

Jesus is saying to Nathanael, “Stick around, disciple! Get to know me. You'll see the heavens opened, and the things and the ways of God will be revealed to you, in me.” The Lord uses a familiar Old Testament image, Jacob's ladder, to make his point. Remember from your Sunday School days? Jacob cheated his brother out of his inheritance, and had to run away from home. But God didn't give up on Jacob. While Jacob was on the road, sleeping out in a field, God gave him a dream, a vision of angels going up and down a ladder from earth to heaven.

Jesus is telling Nathanael that he, the Son of God on earth, is the ladder. Jesus himself is the link between heaven and earth. The whole power and love of God is now available for men and women, for boys and girls, for Nathanael and Philip, for Sherry and Johnny, for Olivia and you and me, in Jesus. Jesus came to help us see God.

And, yes, we only get to see God by faith. In this life, we do walk by faith, and we must. When we go to heaven, faith will become sight. “For now, we see as in a mirror dimly. But then, we shall see face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

We long to see God, and we will. But, for now, we see God in his works of nature. We see God in his miracles and blessings. We see God's hand at work in our daily lives, in our families, in our world. With eyes of faith, we see God's Spirit in the church, raising up new believers, stirring up

volunteers, calling workers, motivating Christians like us to carry on Christ's mission. Responding to Christ's own words, we see Christ in the poor and the needy, in the least of our sisters and brothers out there who are hurting and who need our assistance. And again today, with worshipful, believing eyes, we see Christ in the bread and wine of Communion, sharing his body and blood for our forgiveness, for our eternal salvation.

"If I could just see God," we cry. Well, friends, look to Jesus. Get to know him more and more. Read his words. Study his teachings. Talk to him about your life. Follow in his footsteps. Listen to his call. Get to know Jesus, and you get to know God.

For today, see God by faith. And you'll be ready for that day when you see him face to face. In Jesus' name. Amen.