

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
Text: John 1:43-51  
Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.  
January 18, 2009

### “Come And See”

When you grow up in a city the size of Philadelphia, like I did, you realize that you come from a city within a city. If you live in Philadelphia and a Philadelphian asks you where you come from, they don't want to know if you are from Philadelphia. They really want to know if you are from South Philly, Richmond, the Northeast, Chestnut Hill, Germantown, Society Hill, Center City. If a person knew the "section" of the city you came from, they thought they knew something about you. For example: South Philly meant Italian; Society Hill meant Money; the greater Northeast meant Jewish. I was from Kensington... that could mean a lot of things.

There is a book titled: "White Town U.S.A." It is about the Kensington section of Philadelphia. It described Kensington as an all white, semi-bigoted area where only 2% of the people ever attend college. The majority of people never move more than a mile from where they were born. This book says that the favorite activity in the winter is sitting in front of the T.V. drinking beer, while the favorite activity of the summer is hanging out on the corner drinking beer. With a description like that, one might wonder: can anything good come out of Kensington?!

In reality not everyone from South Philly is Italian, just as everyone from the Northeast is not Jewish. The description of Kensingtonians is not true for everyone either. I know several people from Kensington who did go to college and don't even like Beer. There is a parallel here in the thinking of various neighbors in Philadelphia and the various neighbors in the Bible. We stereotype neighborhoods in the same way Nathaniel did in today's Gospel lesson. He asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Nathaniel came from Cana, which was a larger metropolitan city. The people of Cana thought that Nazareth, and the people there, were insignificant and would never amount to much. This thought is evident not only in today's lesson, but also in the 7th chapter of John where there is a discussion about the coming of the Messiah. When it is suggested that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the response was, "Is the Messiah to come from Galilee?"

People are automatically judged by where they come from. If you lived in a small, rural area in central Pennsylvania and they hear that you're from Philadelphia, you must be a criminal or involved in some sort of corruption. If you're from the Kensington section of Philadelphia, it is thought that you're uneducated, hang on corners and drink beer. If you're from Nazareth, you could never be the Messiah.

What about Conshohocken, or Roxborough or Plymouth Meeting or Lafayette Hill?! I still remember some of *MY* first contacts with people from St. Peter's in this town called Lafayette Hill. It was with the Call Committee who was interviewing me as a candidate to become your pastor. I won't mention them by name, to protect the innocent. In our discussions they revealed that you were still using the old red Service Book and Hymnal from the 1950's, as your worship resource. I remember saying to the committee, "If I come - IT goes." I was already looking forward to our All-Inclusive Bulletin which allows us to use various worship resources. Then the Call Committee came to my previous congregation to hear me preach. Now I happened to be serving in one of those congregations they call a Mega-Church with over 5000 members. The worship area seated about 800 and had large, imposing pillars reaching up to a 50 foot high ceiling. As I greeted the committee in the narthex, they had this look of awe, and one of them asked me, "Why would you ever leave a place like this to come to a Church like St. Peter's in Lafayette Hill?" I immediately said, "Knock it off! Bigger doesn't mean better."

I realized then that we had to address our issue of Self-Confidence. I began to wonder, *can* anything good come out of Lafayette Hill? But as I researched the history of the congregation, looked into the programs, got to know the people, I realized that there was a lot of good things here in Lafayette Hill, but there wasn't a lot of Self-Confidence in the ministry that was being done here. But then after being here for 9 months it came time for this little program called The Boar's Head and Yule Log Festival. Talk about self-confidence! Bragging Rights reigned Supreme! People would tell their friends and neighbors about this impressive Medieval Pageant their congregation produced every year. Then, as now, people would ask, "What's it like." And after several lame attempts at trying to describe it you end up saying, "Come and See!"

In today's Gospel Lesson we read: Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found him, about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathaniel said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "*Come and see.*" Can anything good come out of Lafayette Hill? *Come and see!!!* Following one of our Boar's Head Festivals one of our members said that they were asked, "Do you have this much fun here *every week?*" They said they told them to "Come and See."

Our mission is to share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ with others. We say that we are committed to that mission. The Boar's Head Festival has commitment. People give their time, money and energy to make this festival happen. People arrange their work schedules so they can participate in the festival. Kids will skip Dance Lessons and Sports events so they can participate in the festival. Men will pull themselves away from the television during the middle of an Eagle's Playoff Game, so they can participate in the festival. We are proud of our Boar's Head Festival accomplishments - so we tell people to COME AND SEE!

Now you and I know that there are a lot more ministries that go on here at St. Peter's in addition to the Boar's Head Festival. But the people out there will never know it unless we say to them; Come and See! Next Sunday is our Congregational Meeting. You will receive a booklet of reports - reports about the many areas of ministry and what has been accomplished in the past year. We have shared the message of Jesus Christ through our worship life, in our education programs, but helping to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, visiting the sick, providing parties for Foster Children, supporting missionaries, by doing the things God calls us to do - and yes - even through the Boar's Head Festival.

The people who lived in Nazareth knew that it was possible for the Messiah to come from there. The people who live in Kensington know that it's not all bad. You know that the congregation of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Lafayette Hill is active in the ministry of our Lord, because you are involved and see this activity. But how are other people going to know this? There are many people still asking, "Can anything good come out that congregation of Lafayette Hill?" Our answer should be the same as Philip's answer to Nathaniel when he asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That answer was: "Come and see!" If Non-Christians want to know what good can come out of Christianity, tell them "Come and See!" If someone wants to know what good can come out of this congregation, tell them, "Come and See!"

You can find God at work where you least expect it! He is constantly surprising us. A teacher told me of an incident involving a little girl in her class who had a learning disability. Little Debbie tended to stay by herself and rarely participated in group activities. What annoyed the teacher the most was that Debbie was always wandering off somewhere. One particular day, when the class was outside playing, Debbie wandered off again. The teacher followed Debbie to see where she always disappeared to. At the top of the hill she saw Debbie put a piece of paper under the root of a tree. "Now I've got you!" she said, as she took a firm grasp on Debbie's arm. The teacher then reached down and retrieved the paper. Opening it up, she read: "To the person who finds this, 'I Love You'".

Love can come from where you least expect it. Handicapped people are often ignored. People look at them and ask themselves, "Can anything good come from the handicapped?" Here at St. Peter's we have made some conscious efforts to make our facilities more accessible to the handicapped. We have a ramp up to our main entrance. We have bathroom facilities which are accessible on all levels by someone in a wheelchair. And for those who cannot come to us, through Pastoral visits and our Eucharistic Ministry Program, we go to them. But often Handicapped people are ignored. If someone can't speak, we treat them as though they can't hear either. If someone is in a wheelchair, society acts like they don't exist.

There was an 11 year old boy named Brian who was confined to a wheelchair. Brian was asked what he does when people stare at him in his wheelchair. He said, "I do a couple of wheelies and they're amazed. They say, 'WOW! How did you do that? I can't do it.' Then I say, 'That's because you're different from me.'" Being different is what makes each one of us an interesting person. Unfortunately, being different is what causes people to ask, "Can anything Good come from that person?" "Can anything Good come out of Kensington?" "Can anything Good come from a Handicapped Person?" "Can anything Good come out of Lafayette Hill?" "Can anything Good come out of Nazareth?"

Have you ever thought that God might be in heaven wondering, "Can anything Good come out of those people on Earth?" Someone may have answered God's question the same way Philip answered Nathaniel: "Come and see!" That's exactly what God did! God came to see! He came to Earth in the form of Jesus Christ. He came where you least expect it! He came as a baby born in a barn, born of a "unmarried" peasant woman from a town that was considered one of the slums of Galilee.

The Love of God comes where you least expect it. Love came from a little girl placing a piece of paper under a tree root. Love came from a boy in a wheelchair who realized that people can be different. But the hardest thing is to love people when you know that they have no love for you. If someone was killing you, it would be very difficult to love them. Jesus Christ still had love for his people while they were killing him - while he was dying on the cross. Love does come where we least expect it!

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Jesus Christ did. "Can anything good come out of Lafayette Hill?" Come and see! God's Love can continue to come out of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania if we continue to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, and if we continue to stay with our mission - which is to share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ with others. Amen