

Divine Insight
[written oral form]

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; John 1:43-51
Epiphany 2, Year B

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Who am I? Who are you?

When I was younger, figuring out "Who I was" was a significant preoccupation. I think "identity" is a concern for most people, especially in those early adult years.

In my late teens, believe it or not,.....I had lots of hair, long straight blonde hair,.....and based on my presentation and association I was in the group known as "freaks". These days, people erroneously label those in that cultural trend as Hippies. Hippies were an ephemeral fad in California, during the mid '60s.

Anyway, for a while, I was considered a freak, and that was my projected identity then.

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Labels, categories and stereotypes are an easy way to pigeonhole / file someone, ....and once in that box it's hard to get out.

Moreover, cultural identities really don't adequately define a person,.. and when people are branded,.... it is very judgmental.

Labelling from generalization is judging without just reason,.....and that is dismissive. It contributes to ignorance.....as in ignoring and ignorance in awareness about who a person really is.

Judging tends to end growth, and diminish change and potential.

Moreover, it's impersonal,.....**yet** appealing since it requires less thinking and engagement.

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Classifying people and typecasting has been going on for ages.

It's hard to avoid group identification.

For example,.....we are *Mennonites*.....and with that label comes all kinds of expectations and presuppositions,.....including the food we eat,.....depending on one's particular Mennonite flavour/ heritage.

We may think we know what a Mennonite identity means,... yet we don't drive buggies. We not all pacifists. ?

Stereotypes are rarely accurate.

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I don't know why,.....but.....I'm increasingly growing tired of all the group identities..... all the labels.

I'm in the tribe of *entitled, white male*.....

No doubt that's part of my identity, and I'm told that it affects how I see reality, BUT I'm also much more than that.

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There are so many groups, that it's hard to keep track of them all.

And,.....we tend to separate them, in our thoughts, as good and bad..... and many labels are disrespectful.

Such as the "fly over" people which refers to the rural population that is assumed to have voted for Trump.

To be sure, others snub their noses at those considered to be "urban, educated elite." And, on and on the categorizing and stereo typing continues.

No doubt, there is a grain of truth in those identity labels,....and that grain garners all the focus,..... yet so much is missed andlost.

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Today's Gospel text includes stereotyping.

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Jesus had been out recruiting disciples, and it's noteworthy that this is even recorded.

The day before, he collected Andrew and Peter.

The next day, where our passage begins, Jesus was in Galilee.

Galilee was on the Northern fringe of Palestine. It was considered a pagan area. Galilee means "circle of Gentiles", even so, many Jews lived there, too.

If we were dealing with Mennonites in Canada, then Judea could be the Eastern or Western reserve in Southern Manitoba,..... or likely the Kitchener/Waterloo area.

Galilee could be Toronto.....a mostly pagan region.

Philip was from the same town in Galilee that Andrew and Peter were from. Also, Philip was a Jew, but he had a Greek name.

It is interesting that most of the disciples that Jesus called were not purebreds; they were not model, top pedigree Jews. ????

Cracks quickly form in the stereotypes when inspected.

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So, in our example, Philip was from the Runnymede/High Park area of Toronto--a respectable place, but a bit pretentious.

Jesus was sitting outside in front of a coffee shop, on Bloor St., sipping coffee and eating a bagel.

Philip was heading to the subway station, intending to join his friend, Nathanael on the commute to the city centre.

Upon seeing Philip walking by the coffee shop, Jesus jumped up, and as the scripture puts it, "He Found Philip," and Jesus then said,.. out of the clear blue, with no introduction....."Follow me."

Follow me???? Just "Follow me"... nothing else????

Absent is any form of persuasive reason. Jesus didn't even say who he was, nor did he make any promises to Philip. Moreover, there was no tug on the heart--no emotional appeal whatsoever.

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Many of us think we have to use good arguments and sound doctrine to convince people to follow Jesus. And, some people think that fear and emotional appeals are necessary, but maybe it is seeing Jesus that gives us the desire to be followers???? ???

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Back to the story:

Philip was one of those who could see / recognize Jesus right away, just as John the Baptist did. I'm wonder how that is??? ???

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Anyway,.....Philip hurried across the street and leaped down the stairs to the subway station,...where Nathanael was waiting.

Nathanael was waiting on a bench, next to a fake tree, looking at his cell phone.

Nathanael was a studious, confident person; he hoped one day to be a great religious leader. He was also from the Runnymede/High Park area,.... and active in his church and conference.

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Excitedly, Philip yelled as he approached Nathanael, "We have FOUND him—the one Moses and the prophets wrote about. He's Jesus the son of Joseph from Etobicoke.

Notice the "WE"... have found HIM. It's funny how we get confused about who found whom. It was Jesus who found him.

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Moreover, one would think a Messiah would at least come from Elmira, St. Jacobs or KW? Plus, we could ask the same question about all the disciples' origin. Interesting!

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Nathanael lowered his phone, slowly looked up and with one raised eyebrow, haughtily asked, " Can anything good come out of Etobicoke?"

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Was Nathanael reply, "Can anything good come out of Etobicoke?" based on the arrogance of a friendly urban rivalry.... or ...was it because he knew the scriptures said nothing about a Messiah from Etobicoke /Nazareth who was a son of Joseph?

Either way, his response was berating and judgmental.

Philip reacted by saying, "Well,... Come and SEE"...assuming Nathanael would See as he had.

Tugging on Nathanael's tailored suit, Philip escorted him up the stairs and across the street to the coffee shop to meet Jesus.

Jesus had just taken a huge bite from his bagel, and cream cheese was spilling into his beard.

Nathanael again raised an condescending eyebrow.

Jesus wiped his beard with a napkin, and observed Nathanael's countenance.

Jesus could have been aggressively, defensive and said, "Well... Mr. Hot Shot....., who do you think you are?"

But instead, Jesus wasn't distracted by the outward behaviour or appearance. Jesus saw beyond the facade / beyond Nathanael's crafted persona. Jesus saw Nathanael as Nathanael saw himself, and said to him, "Here is truly a fine and honest Mennonite."

That comment summed up who Nathanael believed himself to be,... or at least, aspired to be.

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Nathanael was amazed and completely disarmed.

With surprise stuck in the back of his throat, he asked Jesus, "Where / how did you get to know me?"

Jesus answered, "I SAW you.... I saw you before Philip came to you."

"You were sitting under a fake tree searching for something true / something divine on Facebook."

Nathanael was awestruck.

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Imagine how it would feel to meet someone who completely knew you.. who knew everything about you—everything,..... and who received you as you,..... no questions asked? Imagine!

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In astonishment, Nathanael proclaimed, "You are the King of Israel. You are the Son of God."

Jesus replied, "Have I merely dazzled you when I revealed what you were doing? Is that why you say that?"

Do you really see?"

Jesus continued, "You Will see much more than stereotypes and miracles. You Will SEE much more."

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This "SEEING" that breaks down barriers and causes people to drop everything, change directions and follow Jesus ... is Inward / insidesoul seeing.

It is seeing without the superficial distractions.

It is seeing the inner person / the real person –the person with the image of God / with the spark of God. This "divine" ... Inward vision connects with a person's passions / aspirations, and it touches the latent love that dwells within the soul.

Stereotypes, reputations, even outward behaviours are not in focus when one truly sees / looks at another person for who she/he really is.

Divine sight -- **IN sight** is connecting with love without fear. It is seeing as Jesus saw others, and it pulls love out and frees the truth.

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I believe we truly want to be seen and received in that gracious and accepting manner,..... and we appreciate the value in being able to see others that way, too.

To see through the facade or stereotype.. and likewise to clearly be seen and received is a wonderful, freeing and empowering experience.

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Jesus saw inside Nathanael. He saw who he really was.... a person full of potential, integrity and the capacity for blossoming love.

Jesus' divine **in-sight** enabled Jesus to know him, and it empowered Nathanael to recognize the divine.

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The Psalmist talks about how God knows all about us.

God knows our deepest, darkest, hidden self..... our true self, and God's vision is like that of a loving parent—it nurtures,... encourages and pulls the good out to the open, and lovingly accepts who we are. That loving vision sees potential and the seed of the divine spark.

Verse 12 of Psalm 139, states that even the darkness is as light to God.

Divine insight draws us to the light, and in the light we can see.

In the light-- the light of the divine,..... darkness, all what that means,... fades away.

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This loving knowledge and acceptance / this divine insight does not make us special, better or entitled. It simply inspires us with love **to be**..... to be who we are--no better and no worse than anyone else.

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It doesn't matter where we've been,...what we have done,... how we look ....or how we are pretending. It doesn't matter what the expectations are or the assumptions.

One's reputation, lineage or family tree doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter what our last name is, our heritage, our culture, our sexual orientation, our political bend or the shade of our skin.

According to the Psalmist, God sees who we really are, and accepts that.....and Loves us. Let that sink in.

We have been given Jesus so that we can better realize that in-sight / that gracious love,.....so that we can better see --God's love.

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No more shame..... No more secrets..... No more pretending, and no more fear of being exposed. How does that vision feel? ????

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Now, you understand how Philip and Nathanael felt,... and why those Jesus encounters merited being recorded in the Gospels.

They are lessons to end blindness.

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Sadly, individuals, most everywhere, are increasingly lonely, and prejudice isn't helping,.....nor is connecting on social media.

I think, maybe the church's greatest mission is to see others with Divine Insight.

We are Christ in the world, and with the passion to love, to accept and to really see each person we encounter, we will in essence be calling disciples, as Jesus did.

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And, it all begins.....by seeing HOW God loves each of us.
Or, as the Gospels writers presented: By seeing Jesus.

Divine inward and outward sight can change the world in a very good way.