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“When Life Becomes an Issue”

Text: John 1:43-51 (1 Samuel 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The stories we hear in the Bible sometimes give us a lot of details about *what* is happening and *why* it is happening, and sometimes we get very few details.

For example, we heard God’s call to Samuel in the Old Testament reading today. Lots of details there. How God called to Samuel four times. How Samuel at first didn’t understand but thought Eli was calling him. And then how Eli realized that God was calling the young man.

But then we also heard the story of Jesus calling Philip in the Holy Gospel, and we get no details there. We’re just told that Jesus found Philip and said ***follow me***. And he did . . . but was it really that easy? We do know that first he went to get his friend Nathanael. And about him we have some more details again, about his skepticism about Nazareth and whether anything good could come from there, and then his confession when he finds out that this fella Jesus of Nazareth is more than just your typical Nazareth hillbilly. ***Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*** That’s quite a quick and substantial about face for Nathanael, to say the least.

Sometimes we know the details, and sometimes we don’t. And sometimes the details surprise us. God has a way of doing things that doesn’t always fit with how we think.

Which I think is a good message for us to hear as we commemorate Sanctity of Life Sunday today. Because like Samuel, Philip, and Nathanael, Jesus has called you and I to follow Him. In fact, He wants all people to follow Him. But that doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy. Sometimes we may not understand how He is calling us or where He is leading us. Sometimes details will be lacking, or the way will be surprising, or maybe even it will be us asking: *That way? Can anything good come out of that way?*

I think that especially true of **life issues**, which can affect us so deeply and profoundly, and is the question we often ask about them. When an unexpected or unintended pregnancy happens, or the flip side of that, when a couple wants children but finds out they cannot have them. Or when a couple, excited about having a child, finds out part way through the pregnancy that the child is severely disabled. Or what about when disease strikes or an accident happens in the prime of life, and suddenly what you used to be able to do you can do no longer. A man loses his job and can’t find another; he can’t support his family anymore and feels his life is now useless. And then there are all the

issues that come at the end of life, for the elderly, the infirm, the sick. It is easy, when these things come upon you or a loved one, to cry out like Nathanael, *can anything good come out of this?* And since the implied answer to such a question is no, because it's not what you want or expect or think could be good in any way . . . you look *not just* for an answer, but often times for a way out; an end to that **life** that is now an **issue**.

But that's not the way the story of Nathanael turned out. Though the implied answer to his question was no - *nothing* good comes out of Nazareth - *Jesus surprised him*. Jesus saw him before he ever saw Jesus. Jesus had come to do something that Nathanael believed and hoped for, but had no idea was happening *now*, and had no idea was - or even could - be happening *in this way*. Through a man from *Nazareth*. And this was just the start. Nathanael would see a lot over the next three years that would surprise him mightily, *especially* the cross - the **life issue** so horrible that it didn't even require the question, *can anything good come out of this?*

But as you know, good did come from that cross, when the grave was forced to open and let go of its dead. That surprise Nathanael received later that night when he was with nine of his fellow disciples behind locked doors because they had a **life issue** - fearing for their lives because they thought the Jews would be coming for them next. And yet they didn't get death, **they got an even greater life**, when an alive, flesh and blood Jesus of *Nazareth* came right through those locked doors (which were no barrier to Him!) and said *peace be with you* (John 20:19).

And so Jesus was right. Nathanael did *see greater things* than the man he met that day at the invitation of Philip.

God has a way of doing things that doesn't always fit with how we think. And so if there is a **life** we have an **issue** with, it's usually not that life that needs to die, but us. We who have the issue. For really that life isn't the issue, our sin is the issue. Our sin which thinks it knows that nothing good can come out of this situation, or this life, especially since it doesn't go along with my plans, my thinking, my wants, my desires, and what I think God should do and give to me. Our sin which doesn't want to be inconvenienced or have to go out of my way. Our sin which fears the unknown, mistrusts God and His goodness, and loves myself more than others and more than God.

And of all that we need to repent. Because it's easy, *too easy*, especially on a day like Life Sunday, to simply criticize those who have or support abortion, and who advocate for assisted suicide or mercy killing, and not acknowledge the truth that we have life issues too - **lives** that we have **issues** with and we would rather be without. And so people that we murder in our hearts because we think, like Nathanael, *nothing good can come out of them*.

But like Nathanael, God has a surprise for us. For you. **The empty tomb.** The empty tomb that preaches to us that the God who can work good even through the horror of the cross, can work good through the crosses He places on you as well. Because that's what they're for - your good. God's not against you, ever. He's **for you**, more than you know. He's **for you**, even in ways that are surprising and unexpected and maybe turn your life upside down. Because just like Nathanael, God saw you before you saw Him. And has plans for you, too, to *see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*. For you to be with Him in Paradise.

And so the Father sent His Son to be the life of the world and the light of the world (John 8:12), to pay the price for our sin, and strip death of its power. And so when we look to death as the answer to those lives we have issues with, that's like trying to light a dark room with a burned out light bulb. And silly as that sounds, our world keeps on doing that, and sometimes we keep on doing that, and then wonder why it's still so dark in here.

There's a better answer. Paul said it in the Epistle we heard: *you were bought with a price*. Bought from sin, bought from death, bought with the life and blood of the Son of God Himself. That's how valuable you are and every life is. And while it's easy to hear that as **Law**: you were bought with a price so now live up to it! Hear it *even more* as **Gospel**: you were bought with a price so high, even before you were born, before you could do anything to be worth anything, the Father considered you - you! - worth the life of His Son. And then, Paul continues, *glorify God in your body*. Glorify God by believing that, confessing that, and then living that - living the life you have been given . . . even under the life-crosses He gives you.

And once you learn to see yourself in that way, you will begin to see others in that way as well. For as important as the Law is - in showing us our sin, and teaching us what we should do, and curbing the sin that would burst out of us upon others - the Law is not the answer. Our government could outlaw abortion and mercy killing and assisted suicide and all kinds and forms of killing tomorrow and you know what? It would still happen. And so many think and say that it's at least better for it to happen safely and legally than secretly and dangerously. But it's not better. It's different, but not better. And I'm not saying we shouldn't try to elect leaders who will defend life in all its forms - we should.

But the answer, the better, the light that's going to enlighten our dark world is the Gospel of life. The truth of a God who had an **issue** with us and our sin, and so gave **His life** to save us - to atone for our sin and raise us to life again. That He is the God who comes into your life in sometimes surprising and unexpected ways, to give you that life. And when the details are few and there is a lot of mystery, says trust me. Look at the cross. *Can anything good come out of that? You bet! Can anything good come out of what you're now going through? You bet! And can anything good come out of that life that*

you now have an issue with? You know the answer. Or as the angel Gabriel told Mary when she was about to have a life issue: *nothing is impossible with God* (Luke 1:37).

January 18th - today - is the day on the church calendar to commemorate the Confession of St. Peter. I chose not to utilize that option today, though Peter is a lot of people's favorite disciple, the one many can most relate to. But I think maybe Nathanael and his question can give Peter a little competition, as I've been going through all the ways we really are a lot like him. And as he learned the value of that life that came from Nazareth, that life from Nazareth that teaches us the value of all life. Including yours.

And so that life from Nazareth has come here today for you and your life, and says *Take and eat, take and drink, this is My Body, this is My Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins*, to defeat death, and give you life. And while some will mock and ask: *Bread and wine? Can anything good come out of bread and wine?* We confess like Nathanael: it may not look like much, but it's not just bread and wine! Here is ***the Son of God***, here is ***the King of Israel***, for you. To feed your Body with His Body, the strengthen your life with His life, and to deal with your sin with his forgiveness. So if there be any **life** you have an **issue** with, give Him the issue in confession and receive the life you need from Him in His forgiveness.

And with that life then comes love. The love that we need for others. The unborn baby and the unwed mother. The one who is dying and the one who wants to die. Those who want life but can't have it and those who have life but don't want it, at least not in the way they have it. Life issues often make us feel helpless and trapped and like there's no good answer. But there is. Because you know the One who has made your life His issue, and ***bought you with a price***, for life now and life forever. Life that is surprising? Maybe. Unexpected? Often. But good? Always.

Really? *Can anything good come from . . . ? **Come and see!***

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.