

*“Beyond Belief”*

Marcia McFee wrote, “It’s not always easy to recognize the image of God in people who are different from us. Too often we find it difficult to imagine that anything good can come from Nazareth!” Hopefully, the video we just watched helps us to open our eyes to the holy in unexpected people, indeed all people.

[A painting of Jesus made up of faces of many people was shown on the screen.] That painting of Jesus was painted by William Zdinak. It has been described by Larry Dipboye in the following way, “The abstract face of Jesus is formed by arranging faces of people you may recognize – Dr. Jonas Salk, Robert Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, Pope John XXIII, Martin Luther King, Fulton Sheen, Pope Paul VI and Alexander Graham Bell – but also faces you would never recognize, like members of the artist’s family.” Dipboye continued, “The story behind the painting is as curious as the finished portrait. According to the Artist’s own account, Zdinak had forgotten his commitment to provide a painting for a religious art show when the voice on the phone jogged his memory with a request for his offering for the show that began the next day. Zdinak pled for one more day and went to work. After numerous failed sketches, at 2:00 A.M. he threw his brushes in the floor in frustration. Then came the vision of the faces; Zdinak scrambled around his house looking for every face that he could find to form the face of Jesus, just in time to keep his promise. Zdinak called it “In His Image,” the image of God in the face of Jesus formed by the faces of humankind. (The Anatomy of Church 1 Corinthians 12:4-13,24b-27 sermon digest January 27, 2013 by Larry Dipboye)

The Book of Genesis in the Old Testament reports that we human beings are created in the Image of God. Although we aren’t given a specific description of what was meant by that, something about all of humanity is closely related to the Image of God. The Gospel of John includes references to the Word or Logos being God and then that Word taking flesh in Jesus. We heard last week from the Gospel of John how John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Son of God following our Lord being baptized by John and the Holy Spirit having descended on our Savior. In Jesus Christ’s Public Ministry, the very nature of God’s Agape Love for us was revealed.

Interestingly enough, late in the Gospel of John, during the last night of Jesus with his disciples, it was the very same Philip, who spoke in today’s Reading, that asked Jesus in **John 14:8**, *“Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.”* Jesus was surprised by the disciples’ failure to comprehend that in him they already were seeing the Image of the Divine Parent. It is reported in **verses 9-10**, *“Jesus answered, ‘For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you,’ Jesus said to his disciples, ‘do not come from me. The Father, Who remains in me, does His Own Work.’”* So, yes, that “In His Image” painting of the face of Jesus reminds us that in him we see our Divine Parent and, we also, recall Jesus’ Ministry demonstrated God Agape Loves all people, has forgiven all people, and invites all people to be in the New Relationship with our Creator and one another!

That is why it is a bit jolting for us to read or hear those shocking words spoken by Nathanael to Philip. It was only a couple of days after John the Baptist had pointed Jesus out as the Son of God to some of his own disciples, when Philip was called to follow our Lord. Then, our Reading reported in **verse 45**, *“Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.’”* Philip’s enthusiasm and joy were quite evident! However, Nathanael’s reaction reminds

me of the all too frequent slurs, prejudicial name calling, and dog whistles, which have been expressed throughout history. Unfortunately, some of our national leaders in the present seem to be trying to bring such hate toward people, who are unlike themselves, back into acceptable everyday usage in our society. Nathanael expressed such bias and prejudice in **verse 46a**, **“‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ Nathanael asked.”** Fortunately, Philip did not give in to the tempting ways of the world. He could have allowed Nathanael’s degradation of the people from Nazareth to dissuade him from continuing to follow Jesus. Philip could have stayed silent after Nathanael made his repulsive statement of hate but, instead, Philip remained calm and issued a gentle challenge to Nathanael’s prejudice in **verse 46b**, **“Come and see”**.

Nathanael accepted Philip’s invitation – challenge and went to see Jesus! He, evidently, quickly forsook his prejudice against Nazarenes because he, also, became a disciple of Jesus! As was stated in the Threshold Moment, “As this season progresses” – the season of Epiphany, **“we will see people discovering this remarkable man named ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ The people had been waiting so long for a Messiah that it was hard to believe for some that the Savior had come out of a little own like Nazareth, much less the son of a common carpenter. How can we go beyond our own beliefs and assumptions about where God shows up? Can we move beyond these to open our eyes to the holy in unexpected places and people?”**

The following humorous tale reminds us the way we can truly move beyond our prejudices and see the holy – the Image of God in unexpected places and people is to seek to mirror Jesus’ Image – to follow his example of welcoming and accepting everyone. The story starts, “Jesus and Moses went golfing one day. Jesus was about to hit a shot and said, ‘Hey Moses, watch this! Just like Arnold Palmer!’ Moses said, ‘Jesus, you can do anything but don’t try to be like Arnold Palmer.’ Jesus said, ‘No, watch this – just like Arnold Palmer!’

Jesus hit the ball in the water so Jesus asked Moses to get the ball. Moses parted the water and got the ball. This continued for about fifteen minutes. Finally, Jesus hit the ball in the water for the seventh time. ‘Please get my ball for me,’ Jesus asked Moses. Moses said, ‘No, I told you to quit trying to be like Arnold Palmer so I’m not getting it this time.’

Jesus walked across the water, reached down, and got his ball.” **“While he was doing this, a couple rode by in a cart and said, ‘Who does he think he is, Jesus?’”** “Moses said, ‘No! He thinks he’s Arnold Palmer!’” (From the sermon, “Mission Possible!” as posted on sermons.com)

We need to move beyond wanting to be someone famous like Arnold Palmer and believing in Jesus to being like Jesus! Believing in Jesus Christ and our Divine Parent – believing that all people – even our enemies or those whom we are uncomfortable with and especially the outcast, the abused, the rejected that they all also have the Image of God, let us be true to that Image as most completely revealed through the Son of God, Jesus Christ! Let us move beyond mere belief in Jesus to agape loving and welcoming everyone, as he did and does! **Let’s show Jesus’ and God’s Image in us and provide a mirror for all people to see our Savior’s and Divine Parent’s Image in them.** Amen.