

## **Children's Moment**

Good morning, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We hope you are safe and well.

Last week, we had a lesson about the crazy time we live in. I talked about how we can care for other people, especially when they're hurting or afraid. I want to continue with that lesson today, but in a more specific way.

Jesus said, "*A house torn apart by divisions will collapse*" (Mark 3:25).

What that means is this: if everyone in a home fights, shouts at each other, does mean things to each other, insults others and acts selfishly, what do you think happens? It's not really a home. It's a place where people may come, but there's no harmony, no real, caring family.

This can happen at home, at work, at church and in public offices, like the city council, state and national offices. But it hurts the most when it happens at home. We don't feel safe or like anyone really cares for us.

I want you to know this: Jesus cares. So do we. And I'm sure your parents and grandparents care. It's just that people get hurt. And it's hard to change ourselves and be a different when that happens.

The good news is that Jesus shows us another way. The apostle Peter said this, "*Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). God will change our lives if we trust Jesus and follow where he leads us.

Do you know what happens when we really, truly live that way? People live together in harmony. We're generous with our time, energy and money, helping other people. We're more concerned about others than ourselves. We spend time together, studying the Bible, praying, serving our neighbors and sharing the good news of Jesus with other people. That's how a house is united ... that's the power of love.

*Will you pray with me?*

**You are invited to be part of Sunday School online.** Please contact us at [CoronaUMC@gmail.com](mailto:CoronaUMC@gmail.com) for information on how to sign up.

**Message: "Anything Good?"**

**"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"** (John 1:46, CEB).

Those were the first words Nathanael used when he heard Jesus was looking for him. "Anything good?" is the key phrase. I hope you can hear how it sounds. Certainly, in our contentious environment, we hear the presupposition behind the sarcasm. It's a joke, but it hides prejudice.

**It's not unusual to encounter difficult topics when you read scripture.** We just don't expect to encounter them in the narrative about Jesus calling his disciples. It's jarring. It's threatening. And personal. And let's face it: most of us have opinions on any number of topics that are flashpoints today. You can choose: race and ethnicity, East & West coast versus heartland, Republican and Democrat, immigration, whether to wear a mask or not; the list could go on and on.

**Let's be clear: worship is not a place to have a confrontation, argument about these topics.** However, worship can be a place where we self-examine our souls as we bring who we are before the Lord. Worship can be a time where we hold up the ideal of the human community. We can use this sacred space we hold together to commit ourselves to community, devoted to living into it as we seek union with the God we follow.

**Worship sometimes confronts us with our sins, while at other times, worship offers us grace, healing and a way forward.** Sometimes that happens within a single service.

**Rather than focusing on the nature of prejudice, I have a suggestion.** When we gather as a body united by God's Spirit, let's focus on how we can create an environment that is inclusive, life-giving and powered by love. This kind of community doesn't happen by accident. It calls us to a higher way of living. We can hear and claim that higher calling, even when dealing with difficult subjects.

**That's what the first house churches did.** We read in Luke's narrative, "Peter said, *'Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who ... our Master God invites.'*

*And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.*

*They followed a daily discipline of worship ... followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved” (Acts 2:38-39, 43b-47, MSG).*

**Regular, ordinary people just like you and me heard Peter’s call to change their lives and embrace the Holy Spirit, letting the Spirit be their guide.** Nathanael heard Jesus’ call and responded. Jesus accepted him – prejudice and all, knowing Nathanael would be changed by their time together. They heard the higher calling, the spiritual invitation, and they answered. It’s shown in this brief glimpse of their lives, connected together spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. And their gathering was healed and became whole, caring for each other as well as those in the community around them.

**I have good news: we are the children of those first believers!**

We have the same DNA – literally and figuratively. We’re all created by God and given a divine, spiritual spark. As Peter came to learn, God invites people to the heavenly feast who we probably wouldn’t. That’s because God made them and knows the good inside them. Even when we are unable to see it, God easily sees it. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “*God’s word is living, active and sharp ... It’s able to judge the heart’s thoughts and intentions*” (Hebrews 4:12, CEB).

**What may be shocking AND comforting is that God also made us and knows the good inside of us.** We can overcome our lack of vision and prejudices. We can learn not to judge others, giving them the space to love God as they were created to do so. We can give others the freedom to live their lives by faith without fear. We can go to God with the things that trouble us about our lives, the lives of others and this world. When we do, we’ll find pardon, healing and peace. We’ll change. And we’ll find that God’s grace pours over us, like healing oil.

**There is a balm for our soul.** There is healing for our household. Our community can unite. Our nation can recover and be restored. We can live lives worthy of Jesus' calling. We can be commissioned as God's agents of love and grace, changing the world in a life-giving way.

**The way is to embrace Jesus and truly accept the Holy Spirit within us.** That means embracing change. We are following someone else's lead, rather than charting our own course. It isn't easy. It means we need to understand the physical, mental and emotional state of ourselves and others. But, more important, we need to let God show us how to look deeper to see the spiritual state of our soul and the souls of other people.

**When we can do so, the question Nathanael asked changes.** "The question 'can anything good' come from those unlike us gets turned around. We are the ones asked 'can anything good' come from us.

**Is there anything good in us that's worth God's grace and Christ's compassion?** If I could hold a mirror up so you could look at yourself, I'd encourage you to ask, 'Can anything good come from the face I see in front of me?'"<sup>1</sup>

**I have good news: the answer is a resounding YES!!** Yes, there is good in us, as flawed as we are. Every person is made in the image of God our creator, and God says that's not just good; it's supremely good (Genesis 1:31). God's grace is available to restore us and make us true believers who love God and all of our neighbors freely and gratefully. That's who we can become when we accept Jesus' love and commit ourselves to life-giving change.

**That's what we can share when we worship together and when we speak with others who don't know how to live another way.** That's God's message for today. It's the good news of Jesus. God gives us a voice to speak to those around us – verbally and nonverbally, that shows how we truly live into God's higher call. Jesus makes our lives better when we're together – spiritually and literally.

**Let our prayer be for our eyes to be opened to see the good in those around us and the face staring back at us in the mirror.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Follow Me series, preaching notes*

**John 1:43-51 (CEB)**

<sup>43-44</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. When he got there, he ran across Philip and said, "Come, follow me." (Philip's hometown was Bethsaida, the same as Andrew and Peter.)

<sup>45-46</sup> Philip went and found Nathanael and told him, "We've found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets. It's *Jesus*, Joseph's son, the one from Nazareth!" Nathanael said, "Nazareth? You've got to be kidding." But Philip said, "Come, see for yourself."

<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw him coming he said, "There's a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body." <sup>48</sup> Nathanael said, "Where did you get that idea? You don't know me." Jesus answered, "One day, long before Philip called you here, I saw you under the fig tree." <sup>49</sup> Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi! You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!"

<sup>50-51</sup> Jesus said, "You've become a believer simply because I say I saw you one day sitting under the fig tree? You haven't seen anything yet! Before this is over you're going to see heaven open and God's angels descending to the Son of Man and ascending again."