

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, B
I Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]
(Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17)
I Cor 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

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One of the most difficult things about moving to a new city is that at first, there's nobody there who knows you very well. It takes some time before you develop friendships where you're willing to reveal your thoughts and feelings, and it takes even longer to live through enough experiences together so you feel you truly know these friends and they know you. During the first year in a new place, you can find yourself longing to spend just one afternoon with old friend, someone you don't have to pretend with. Someone who sees through those masks you put on each morning. Someone with whom you can be completely yourself.

Nathanael must have been surprised when a perfect stranger addressed him like an old friend. Nathanael wasn't new in town, but Jesus was. Jesus came from Nazareth, which didn't impress Nathanael much, but since his friend Philip was so excited about Jesus, Nathanael was willing to "Come and see" what this new teacher was all about.

And Jesus immediately recognized Nathanael, even though they'd never met before. Jesus was able to read his character and say: "Here's an honest Israelite... a man with an open spirit who keeps no secrets and tells no lies. Here's someone ready to receive a new word from God."

Nathanael was mystified, because Jesus was right about his character. "How do you *know* that about me?" he asked.

Jesus said, "Nathanael, I've known you longer than you realize. I saw you back there under the fig tree, before you even came over to talk to me..."

Something must have clicked for Nathanael, because he quickly received this stranger as the old friend he truly was. Nathanael could tell that Jesus really did know him, and cared about him, too. He sensed that Jesus was someone he didn't have to pretend with, someone he could trust. And more than this, Nathanael sensed that through Jesus, Someone even greater, the Living God, was reaching out to begin a relationship with him.

The truth is that Jesus did know Nathanael, even before they met -- just the way God knows each one of us. God reads our character. God sees into our souls. God is well-acquainted with all our inmost wants and desires and drives. In fact, God knows us better than we know ourselves.

Now, it could be absolutely terrifying to be “known” this way by God. When I was a kid I imagined God was a lot like Santa Claus:

*He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake,
He knows when you've been bad or good...*

As a kid, most of my thinking about God was centered around issues of bad and good, right and wrong. So it made me downright nervous to think that God could know everything I ever did and count all the bad stuff against me someday. It took many years for the good news of God's forgiveness to sink in. In fact, I'm pretty sure it will be a lifelong journey for me to fully understand and fully believe that through Jesus Christ, God forgives all our sin. God wipes the slate clean and just quits counting any marks against us, forever! God does know the very worst about every one of us, yes, and God forgives all of it, covers it over with love, redeems all of it in kindness and acceptance through Christ. Every morning sunrise is a new opportunity to begin again fresh in God's forgiveness.

Fortunately, my image of God has changed since I was a kid – and my trust toward God has grown. When we dare to trust that God operates on the basis of love and mercy, then it becomes deeply comforting to know that God knows us so well. It's a relief to realize we don't have to pretend with God. God sees behind our masks, and God accepts us more fully than we accept ourselves.

There are beautiful words from the Psalms that picture how deeply God knows us. The Psalm appointed for today, Psalm 139, reads,

*O Lord, you have searched me out and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it...
For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb...
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth...*

Psalm 139, selections

If you ever need reassurance that God is with you, turn to that Psalm, Psalm 139. God has known us since before we were born. God knows us the way an old friend does — or better, the way a loving parent does, who has watched us develop all

through the years, who has always been on our side, wanting what's best for us, wanting what will truly give us life.

God knows what has shaped us and what we've been through -- our joys and troubles, our successes and failures, our celebrations and our disappointments. The burdens we bear. And God also knows what lies ahead of us. God knows our dreams and our hopes for ourselves and this world. God knows what we are able to accomplish, what challenges we can handle. God sees in us talents and abilities that we might never see in ourselves. God sees in us resilience that can get us through tough times, with God's presence to strengthen us.

God sees who we are, and God sees who we can be. And God envisions the part each one of us can play in healing this hurting creation and making this world a more just and life-sustaining place. God calls each one of us by name, to live in the strength of God's love and to give our lives to God's good purposes.

God knows us through and through, and God invites us to know God in return, to deepen the relationship. First, God washes us clean in baptism. First, God forgives us. First, God calls us by name and claims us in love. Then, this God who has always known us invites us to learn to know God as well.

It's an open-ended invitation, something like that "Come and see" that Philip spoke to his friend Nathanael. We have the freedom to explore this relationship with God, to ask questions and to express doubts as we go with God through all the experiences of life. We have the freedom to get to know this God who knows us so well already, and explore the directions God has prepared for us as we live out God's dreams for the world. God has dreams of peacemaking and care for those in need. Dreams of bringing health to this planet and all the creatures upon it. God has dreams of feeding the hungry and teaching those who are eager to learn. God has dreams of every person using their gifts to serve the human community and the common good.

"Come and see" what it's like to live in relationship with the One who knows you better than you know yourself, and who loves you better too. Come and see what God sees in you, and where this sacred relationship will lead you. Come and see. Amen.