

*Come, Lord Jesus – make these words your Word, that our hearts may become your heart. Amen.*

Did Samuel ever stopped telling that story?

Did he say to his sons, sitting around the campfire,

"Hey, did I tell you about the time I heard God call my name?" "Yes, Dad..."

"I was no older than you are now. I thought it was old Eli calling me..."

"I remember, Dad – God had to call you three times."

Did Nathanael ever stopped telling the story to his grandchildren?

"Did I tell you about when I first saw Jesus?" "Not this week, Grandpa..."

"Oh, it was amazing! It was Philip who told me first, 'We've found him!

The One the prophets talked about! The One we've been waiting for!

Then Philip said who it was. Just some carpenter's son from Nazareth.

Not a likely place for a Messiah to come from. Philip just said, "Come and see."

So I went with him – why not? And when Jesus saw me coming

he looked right at me, like he knew me, even before he said anything..."

"Yeah, yeah, we know, you told us what he said..."

"Oh, so you've heard this story before?" Nathanael says with a smile.

"Yeah– we know – he said he saw you under the fig tree before Philip came."

"That's right. He knew me. I didn't have to explain anything. He knew me.

(Pause.) I wish you'd met him. He was the most amazing guy..."

"Well, Grandpa, you tell us we do meet him every time we gather for church,  
and hear the Word and break the bread and drink the wine, right?"

"That's right, I did tell you that. It's true. But I wish you could have seen the things  
he did! And yet – He told me I'd see greater things than these – and I have."

Here's a great chain reaction. John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Lamb of God.

Andrew says, "Where?" and goes to check him out.

Convinced he's the Real Deal, Andrew finds his brother Simon and tells him,

"We have found the Messiah!"

And Andrew and Simon tell Philip, who comes and sees

Jesus says to him, "Follow me." And Philip doesn't keep the news to himself either

– he goes and finds his friend Nathanael, and tells him: "Come and see."

What do you do when you're excited about something – when something amazing has happened? When you've met someone, found something precious? A new job; new love; new grandchild; a miraculous escape; an amazing gift... Most of us can't wait to tell someone. Sometimes everyone!

Well, God is still in the business of showing us “greater things than these.” One Sunday a few years ago, I preached about the power we have in the Name of Jesus. Well, that night one of my parishioners, who was the district animal control officer, had to take charge of a dog whose owners were in jail; and when she got back to the kennel, the dog got away from her and ran. All night she tried to find that dog – she searched, she called, she set a trap in a crate. Nothing. Finally she went home. But she couldn't sleep. She went back at about two in the morning, she called, she searched. Nothing. At about 5, she remembered my sermon: Use the name of Jesus. So she said, “Okay, Jesus, I don't even know if you're up at this hour, but I'm going for a cup of coffee, and I'd really love to see that dog in the crate when I get back.” She said it was kind of sarcastic, barely a prayer. So she was a little freaked out, when she returned with her coffee, to see the dog sitting in the crate! And she couldn't stop telling people about it! She called me. She said she'd told a million people already. She said, “People told me they're going to check out this church, this is so amazing.”

When we see God doing amazing things, when we've found something we've been looking for, we usually have to share it. We can't keep it in. So how has this Good News of God's power and love for us in Jesus Christ, that we celebrate every Sunday, become so ho-hum, so domesticated, that most of us have no problem at all keeping it to ourselves? Is a 2,000-year-old secret a little stale? Do we think everyone who wants to has already heard this one? Or has it stayed too much a story in a book, and not something we feel?

Have we forgotten this promise, “You will see greater things than these?” My friends, I know we all have amazing stories to tell if we believe Jesus, that we can do greater things even than Jesus did, in His name. I know that God is at work all over this congregation – I hear stories. Of healing. Of “coincidences” that have God's hand all over them. But do we tell each other these great stories? Do we tell our friends who are not “church people” these stories?

The animal control person told anyone who would listen the story about the dog – she left it up to them to draw their own conclusions.

That's all that's asked of us – to tell the truth about our experiences with God. just tell our stories and invite people to come and see.

Because when we hear stories of God's action, it increases our faith, and as we exercise more faith, we see more of God's activity in our lives.

After the dog story had gotten around, another parishioner found herself also looking for a dog who had gotten out. A whole group of people were fanned out, looking and calling, and she was too – till all of a sudden she remembered to stop and pray. Darned if that dog didn't walk right up to her the next minute.

Now, was God just on a run of dog miracles that week?

Or was something else going on? I believe that the story of the first event inspired faith that figured in the second event.

The more we hear about God's amazing power, the more we believe in it.

The more we believe it, the more we talk about it, the more others believe.

There are a lot of people out there, looking hard for meaning, for peace, for love, and believe me, they have never heard this story, not the way you tell it.

And they're hungry to hear it. If Andrew and Philip hadn't taken their excitement and rushed to tell Peter and Nathanael; if they'd said – "Well, they have a perfectly good religion already; let's not bother them with the fact that we think the Messiah is here..." I don't think we'd be sitting here today.

That's all that's asked of us – to tell others about what God is doing in our lives, what we are doing in God's life, and introduce them to Jesus.

Jesus can handle Nathanael's skepticism, and that of our friends.

He gets Nathanael's attention by letting him know that Jesus already knows him, though they'd never met before. *Lord, you have searched me and known me...*

*You know when I sit down and when I rise; you discern my thoughts from afar.*

And Nathanael is hooked, as surely as that dog was sitting in that crate.

*"Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."*

But Jesus doesn't leave it at that. He says:

"You ain't seen nothing yet, my friend. You're going to see greater things than that."

When he talks about "angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," like Jacob's ladder, he's giving Nathanael a BIG clue about who he is.

"God is here, right in front of you: do you know it?"

Heaven is now open; through Him we will have access to the power of God, the love of God, the person of God. We will see “greater things than these.”

This week our country really needs to believe “greater things than these.”

We need to see unexpected peace and blessing in the face of threatened violence as we enact our constitutional ritual of peaceful transfer of government.

This weekend we lift up the legacy of a man who knew how to say,

“Here I am. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening,”

a man whom many consider a saint and a prophet for our time.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had vision to see what many did not think was even possible.

*“I have a dream,”* he preached. ... *It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal”.*<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther King knew about seeing and doing “greater things than these.”

On April 3, 1968 he gave another famous speech. He said, *Like anybody, I would*

*like to live a long life.... But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do*

*God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over.*

*And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to*

*know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!*

*And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything.*

*I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!*<sup>2</sup>

The next day Martin Luther King was shot and killed. Yet his dream did not die.

He saw a future many could not imagine; he saw “greater things,”

and helped bring them into being, and he shared that story with others.

And that future took root in the national imagination and grew.

Twelve years ago this week a gifted man, part Black, part white, with a half-sister

who is part Indonesian, was inaugurated the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.

King’s dream had come closer to being our reality. Since then, we’ve slipped back,

as our national disease of racism flared like a dormant virus virulently

reactivated. And it will resurge until we actually heal this 400-year-old wound.

Some think it is so woven into our national character it cannot be rooted out –

but that’s not faith in the God of greater things.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream” Speech, delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C. Read or hear it in its entirety at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “I’ve Been to the Moutaintop” Speech, delivered 3 April 1968, Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters), Memphis, TN. Read or hear it in its entirety at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>

Jesus says, "Take me at my word! Heaven is open.

God's power is still real and active in the world."

And as we dare to dream of God's vision; as we exercise faith and

see God's greater and greater things, we will tell the stories to others

so they too will exercise faith, and they will see greater and greater things,

and tell the stories, and on and on it will go until the day when we find ourselves

speechless, face to face with the One who made us,

and our stories about God are enfolded in our life in God.

That tomorrow begins today.

*Amen.*

**John 1:43-51**

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

**1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)**

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

**Psalm 139**