

A Sermon given on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany- 01-17-2021
St Mark's Parish by C. Daniel Barr

“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?”

Everyday we come across new people. People we pass in the streets, people we see out walking, people in line with us. This is modern life. How do we see, really see, these people though? Are they people just moving through life, like we are, or are they impediments to what we're trying to accomplish at the moment? Perhaps they're taking way too much time with the only sales clerk available, and we just need to know where the shirts are located? It all blurs into a mass of, 'I'm important! I have needs!' And while modern life is certainly fast in all aspects, the people we encounter, by chance, by accident, by circumstance, are all there *for a reason*. While they may not be there, preordained, like Jesus was, to deliver us a missal—that which cannot be questioned—they *are* there to help us see something we've missed. And do we see it, or hear it? Sometimes yes. And sometimes not at all. Because there are, unknown to us, extraordinary people that come into our lives, people that we desperately need, who can change our lives, but that we have already judged as annoying, or unworthy, or in the way. And...we don't give them the time of day.

But we also meet, as I did one day at work, people like the older man asking about clothing for hiking 'serious trails' for the son of a friend, who was about to take on the Pacific Crest Trail. His first question was, 'Are you a hiker?' To which I replied, 'Yes, I certainly am. How can I help?' And then he told me the tale of his friend's son, who was so excited about having the time and the ability to take on this famous trek. He asked numerous questions about the clothing and the technology now used, and decided on a few items, thanked me, and went on his way. Somewhat expected where I was working at the time; no surprises there. But there was a marked difference in *this* particular conversation compared with similar conversations I've had with others on this same topic: when I asked him if he would be accompanying the young man on the PCT, he replied, 'No, I'm now blind, and so no longer hike those types of trails.' I made a reply, though I can't remember what I said, but I felt only compassion for this man, who obviously loved hiking, but who could no longer safely do so because of his eyesight. His response saddened me, as he spoke fondly of his time there on the Pacific Crest Trail, but his enthusiasm for the young man's journey, the sights he would see, and his time being there, trekking through one of the world's most beautiful trails, was breathtaking. Yes. He wanted to be there; he had been before. His excitement for someone else about to experience it for the first time, however, was astonishing.

Had I judged this man as just another annoying person, asking questions about things of which they know little or nothing, I would have missed out on this extraordinary man, who brightened my day, and in conversation, taught me things about a place I'd never been. His true gift, though, was teaching me that judging others may deprive me of the wisdom they possess, and that they're happily giving to me. Have I done this many times before? Most likely. But each person I meet like this encourages me to be a better person. A person more willing to listen, to empathize, and to be more fully human.