

Under the fig tree. That's where Jesus saw Nathanael. It must mean on the sidelines. Off the court. Not in the crowd. Not actively participating. Watching. Observing. Maybe even being a wallflower.

Under the fig tree. Nathanael had to have been there for more than a little while—or he had to go under the fig tree *frequently enough*—that the Lord would have associated him with that spot.

John's gospel tells us this would-be-disciple was under the fig tree, but it doesn't tell us why: *Why* was Nathanael under the fig tree? Had he sought it out? Was Nathanael one living a quieter life, having made a conscious choice to get out of the rat-race? Was he older, in retirement, or didn't think his friend's search for the Messiah was worthwhile anymore?

What about self-doubt. Maybe Nathanael saw or heard about this new Jesus venture and thought, *That's not for me. I'd be no good for that. They wouldn't want me.*

Countless inner monologues could have driven and kept Nathanael under that fig tree. *If I follow him, what will other people say about me? What if it fails? What if I fail? What if it's dangerous? I've never heard of the Messiah, the Lamb of God, or this Jesus son of Joseph. Why bother?*

Doubt. Fear. Confusion. Ignorance. Laziness. Jadedness. Pick your reason. For there was *something* that had Nathanael under that fig tree.

And whatever kept him there would have been the same myriad, variety of reasons that keep us sidelined as well. They would be the same rationales that prevent us from getting involved more deeply and from journeying more closely in the life of faith: We're unsure or confused. We fear. We doubt. We desire a simple, easy life.

But God, you see, has a way of getting us out from under the tree. God has a way of disrupting our doubts, fears, confusions, even our desires. God finds ways of calling us beyond our current circumstances.

Let's consider Nathanael again. What gets him out from under the fig tree? It's not some incredible, faith-filled, mountain-top, once-in-a-lifetime response. First and foremost, it's people. His friend Phillip finds Nathanael to tell him of a great discovery: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." Nathanael doubts, but his friend Phillip persists: "Come and see."

It is Nathanael's relationships, community, the circle of friends who invite him and the people who encourage him to come and move from where he is and see what he may not yet believe. It is through other people that Nathanael hears God calling. Friends, neighbors, and fellow disciples who are persistent, who don't take no for an answer, who are patient and willing to make him do what he knows he can—other people help Nathanael recognize when and how God is trying to reach him.

Nathanael's friend Phillip convinces him to come and see the second influence that helps Nathanael get out from under the tree: Jesus. And

Jesus knows Nathanael. Jesus even knows his problems. Christ senses his doubts, fears and confusion. Nathanael can't hide it, for "[h]ere is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Jesus says.

Yet Jesus has not only truthfully recognized who Nathanael is, he also has firm idea on who he can become. Because Jesus sees Nathanael's potential. Christ sees in Nathanael not some wallflower on the sidelines but an apostle with possibilities, a servant with strengths and gifts. Christ sees a disciple with a destiny yet to unfold. He knows there is more to life for this man than sitting under a fig tree.

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So what fig tree are you beneath today? And who calls you out from that tree?

Because as it is for Nathanael, so it is for us: Jesus sees us truthfully as we lounge under the fig tree. But Christ also knows where we can go when called us into the life of discipleship.

For God knows and sees and loves the fig-tree dwellers. And friends and community have a way of seeking out and inviting them. And Christ has a way of recognizing them and us. Seeing us, loving us, and drawing us out from under the branches' shadows.

Because with Jesus Christ, there is always something more than the fig tree. Here, in this place, Christ and Christ's community are encouraging you to come and see.

No matter fig tree you are beneath today, we will all see greater things following our friends' and following Jesus' invitation to get up.

AMEN.

Rev. Kathryn L. Pocalyko
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1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51