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*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA*

*Second Sunday of Epiphany*

*January 17, 2021*

*I Samuel 3:1-20; Ps. 138:1-6, 13-18; I Cor. 6:12-20; John 1:43-51*

Last Saturday some of us from Christ Lutheran joined others from our synod for a Zoom workshop on building resiliency. It was really interactive and one of the activities that my small group aced was creating a list of everything we do to sabotage ourselves and burn ourselves out. We listed things like staying up too late, forgoing our time in prayer and meditation, working without a break, ingesting too much news or sweets or alcohol, and we explored what beliefs we held that drove us to do those kinds of things.

We were then asked to close our eyes and envision walking down the street and meeting our future self walking toward us who instead of being burned out, was confident and resilient. We envisioned asking our future self what they were doing to remain resilient instead of tired and burned out. When I asked my future self that question, it was like a wake-up call. What I clearly heard was “stop and pray to know who is in charge.”

Stop and pray to know who is in charge. Of course I should know this as a pastor, but it’s even true for clergy that often we can sabotage ourselves and burn ourselves out and forget that God is in charge, that this is God’s church, not ours. We can barrel straight ahead without stopping to know God, to know Jesus, and we can move so fast through life and work that, tragically, we don’t allow Jesus to know us.

In the gospel today, Jesus called Philip to follow him, and then Philip found Nathaniel while he was sitting under a fig tree and invited him to follow Jesus, as well.

In the Bible, sitting under a fig tree symbolizes contemplation, prayer, and finding peace.

In Micah 4:4, the prophet Micah predicts that all shall sit under their own fig trees and no one shall make them afraid. In Zechariah 3:10, God will remove guilt from inhabitants of the land when they are invited to sit under the fig tree.

What happened to Nathaniel when he had stopped under the fig tree to contemplate, to pray, was not only that he was invited to follow Jesus, but while he was resting, while he was contemplating, while he was praying, Jesus got to know him.

When Philip had invited Nathaniel while he was under the fig tree to come and see Jesus, Nathaniel was contemplating and even doubting whether anything good could come out of Nazareth. But then Jesus met Nathaniel and declared “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathaniel asked Jesus, “Where did you get to know me?” And Jesus answered him, “I saw you under the fig tree.” Nathaniel realized that while he was resting and contemplating Jesus truly got to know him, and therefore Nathaniel responded with trust and hope in Jesus. Nathaniel began to follow Jesus, all because he stopped to contemplate, rest, and pray under that fig tree.

This makes me wonder: do we all need a “fig tree” to sit under so that we can stop and pray to know who is in charge? A place we can contemplate and wrestle with our doubts? A place where we can know Jesus, and even more importantly, a place where Jesus can know us?

Remember, it was when Samuel was lying down resting that God came to him and called to him four times. I've always thought that sleep was one of God's greatest gifts to us, but perhaps resting in our beds is also a "fig tree" where we can best contemplate and know God. Because we're not running a thousand miles an hour, because we are forced to stop and rest, it's also a place where God can get to know us, as well.

It's under the fig tree, whatever your "fig tree" is, whenever we stop to contemplate and pray to know who is in charge, that Jesus gets to know us – our true selves, with all our doubts, all our imperfections, all our fears and all our needs.

And I believe that if we do not find a "fig tree," a time and place to stop working, to contemplate, to pray, to know Jesus and let Jesus know us, that we will continue to sabotage ourselves and end up burned out.

The good news is that God, that Jesus, is patient. God will keep searching for us in every nook and cranny of our lives.

As the psalm we heard today says, Lord, you have searched me out; O Lord, you have known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting-places and are acquainted with all my ways. Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. You encompass me, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

My prayer for you is that may you find your fig tree, so that you may remember that God sees you, God knows you, and God loves you completely. Amen.