

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious loving God, in the sunshine, in the darkness, in the winter, in the summer, in the goodness of the rain, in the dryness of heat, in the cold weight of the snow, in the emptiness of drought, we worship you. God, in all things you offer possibilities: possibilities for growth, possibilities for care, possibilities for relationship, possibilities for service. May we take hold of what you offer with all our hearts, and in return, we offer you all that we are. Take us, form us, mold us as we best can be used for service to each other, to you, to your blessed world. Holy God, we offer you the burdens of our hearts, the cares, the woes, the struggles we carry with us. Take them into your loving arms as we pray together, work together, and sing your praises with one voice.

Holy One, in today's world full of assumptions, we find ourselves buying in and hating it all at the same time. In today's world of assumptions we find ourselves being the object of assumption and being the ones who assume. Gracious God, we seek the antidote to this vicious circle, the antidote found in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Holy God, help us to grow with one another, never to assume who they are or what they should be doing based on what we think. We dislike it when it is done to us; lead us away from the temptation ourselves. Let us dwell with one another, that they make fully know us and we may fully know them to avoid the scourge of assumption. We pray all these things in the name of the one who knows us and calls us to know others in return, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray...

SERMON

In today's world, it seems like the key to who you are depends on where you're from, especially on our first impressions. I say I am from Nebraska to those who are just

meeting me, and the assumptions come rolling in. People automatically assume that I grew up farming, that I know the science of meat, where the Prime Rib on a cow comes from, that I have never seen a city before, and that we recently acquired electricity. On the other hand, my wife comes from Lancaster County, and she later moved to Philadelphia. Hearing the first part, you might assume that she is Amish. Living in Philly, you assume that she's got a tough side. She does, of course, have her hardened "Philly face" and knows how to use her car horn as a hearty communication tool. Using both of those ideas, you can assume who we are, but let's be honest, that doesn't explain who either of us is. You might assume someone from New York adores the Yankees. You might assume someone from the South is naturally racist. You might assume someone from Texas thinks they are naturally superior, because everything is bigger in Texas. You might assume those from Wisconsin are entitled Packer Fans who think they will win today...well...that one might be true, except for the winning today part.

All of these are assumptions. Have you heard what it means to assume? It's not very flattering. And yet, we all do it. It's much easier than we dare admit, and it can quickly go from the simple, unwarranted assumptions to the violent. When we are talking about politics, each of the political parties is branded something based on one's own politics. There is no nuance there. You are either this or this, which makes you enemy or friend. There is no getting to know the person for who she or he is. But the problems of assumption today are much greater. The very nature of racism is an assumption of what someone is based on the tone of their skin. As we come to have known, that is never correct. As you go through all the "-ism"s in our world, you will find assumption after assumption. In a way, it's human nature, but that's no excuse. We are called to more than

just our human nature or just the way things are. Assumption hurts, those who are assumed about and those who do the assuming, because they cut off an opportunity for knowing another person whom God has created and created well. It even happened to the Lord Jesus Christ! Let's hear the story again of Philip and Nathaniel, see how Nathaniel was misguided in assuming, and see how Jesus Christ was able to move beyond Nathaniel's assumptions. In his actions is a great opportunity for us.

Here we have the story of Jesus calling Philip and Nathaniel, two of what would come to be Jesus' band of twelve faithful disciples. He found Philip and said "Follow Me!" Philip apparently knew who was calling him, for he went to his colleague Nathaniel, and wants to tell him the story of what has happened. So he does. But the conversation doesn't go as Philip had expected, for Nathaniel already has some opinions about this man.

This is the one part of this story that gets me every time. Philip gives Jesus this excellent introduction, essentially calling him the greatest thing since sliced bread and then some. His statement could not be greater and stronger. This is the one all of the scriptures have been pointing to; this is the one we have all been waiting for. This is the man who could beat the Seattle Seahawks at home singlehandedly: this is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, from Nazareth! Wow! Amazing! With that kind of excited introduction, you'd expect an equally amazed response, but it doesn't come. Instead, Nathaniel's response is blunt, simple, and laden with sarcasm. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Talk about putting a needle in your balloon. It's off-putting, because we can easily see assumption in action. By that little sentence, Nathaniel has already dismissed that Jesus had any sort of worth simply because he had come from Nazareth, not to mention him being the long awaited Messiah. Sure, that nothing good could come from Nazareth was

probably what they thought in those days, just like all those we said earlier. Electricity and phone lines are a new thing in Nebraska. Everyone's rough and tough in Philly. I can tell you, these are all garbage. Philip thinks the same; he doesn't buy in to Nathaniel's weak argument. Philip's response brings it all together, what Nathaniel said and what to do about it. And, as we shall see, it's the right way of responding to the shutdown of an assumption. "Come and see," Philip says. A good response, but that's not the best translation. According to the podcast Sermon Brainwave, it's better translated, "Come and dwell." That makes much better sense. "Come and see" is simple, it's passive; it's almost too peripheral, and one could easily opt out. But when we come and dwell, we spend time. We collaborate. We form a lasting relationship. It's an active response. We look beyond the assumptions and we see who a person really is. When Nathaniel does, he comes to find Jesus who already knows him. Jesus doesn't stand on assumption but opens himself up to relationship with Nathaniel. Nathaniel responds in kind, and a new relationship is born. Through that relationship, Jesus tells him that he will see heaven opened and the angels descending upon the Son of Man. In other words, this relationship opens him to seeing God's work through the ministry and person of Jesus Christ. Nathaniel drops the assumption, and he comes to understand that God is in the world, that God has come in the form of this man. All he had to do was get to know him, and the results spoke for themselves.

When you go away from home, how do people react to you when you say that you are from Wyoming? Do they jump on the assumption bandwagon? Do they easily say, in the mold of Nathaniel, "Can anything good come out of Wyoming?" Let's face it, Wyoming is not like the other states. Wyoming is the only state in the Union that carries a population of

less than a million with an estimation of less than 600,000 in 2013. It is the second least densely populated state in the Union, right behind Alaska. Some think that everyone in the state is living rurally, that there are no cities to speak of. Well, that's obviously wrong simply by us being here today. Contrary to the assumption, everyone is not a cowboy or rancher, although many people are University of Wyoming Cowboys. Wyoming may not be the sexiest place on the face of the earth, but that does not mean anything. All of these things, if you read them a slanted way, can add up to an empty place with people who don't know how to relate to one another. But that is reading the facts with the eyes of assumption. Does that say anything about who the people are? Of course not, and there's an easy way to figure that out.

And that way is simple: to jump out of our assumptions, we only have to know and understand. Wyoming is not a barren empty land but a unique place with plenty of potential. They call Cheyenne "The Legend" for a reason. But when we go deeper, we see a lot more. This is a special community. We all have our different stories, the different paths that led us to this place and this time. Some of us were in the military. Some of us worked the railroad. Some of us did neither but came to Wyoming for our different reasons. We all have our different stories and ways in which we came to be here today. The way I know is that I have come to know you as a congregation and as individuals. Some of you have come from elsewhere like me and have made a new life here. Some of you have been born here, raised here, and serve here, and what we are is a dynamic community with a lot to offer the world. As you hopefully have noticed, I am not limited because I came from Nebraska, and in the same way, it's obvious in the opposite. When you get to know the place, when you get to know the people, the assumptions can't hold up.

We don't like it done to us, that's certain. When faced with any kind of assumptions, you have a few choices. You can get mad and walk away, but what does that do? In a way, that only reinforces their belief, because we give them nothing else to prove otherwise. On the other hand, you can prove them otherwise. The only option, as Jesus so eloquently demonstrated, is to invite others into relationship with you. Our response can be that of Philip: "Come and see." Come and dwell with us, and you can see otherwise.

None of us wants to be the victim of assumptions, based on where we are from, our upbringing, our looks, our preferences, our choices, or anything else. Why do we dare do it to others? If we don't want to be asked that question, we shouldn't do it to others. If we want to show others that good can come out of Wyoming, we can help prove it to them as well by dwelling with others. Step out and get to know one another, for we each have our stories, and those stories are the antidote to the scourge of assumption. Relationship not only helps the other, it helps us spread the word that, indeed, something good can, and certainly does come out of Wyoming, and we are the proof.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" We know better. This was the home of God as a human being, Jesus Christ, who came to teach the world a different way. While we may want to mock Nathaniel, we often have the same perspective. "Can anything good come out of Nebraska?" "Can anything good come out of I believe I can definitely say yes. In the same way, we can hear, "Can anything good come out of Wyoming?" It is our task together to say yes, and to show those who would doubt the truth. We show the world what is good, what is right, when we follow the path of Christ, the path of love and goodness, that does not depend on where you were born and raised defined by any border but by the action that brings Christ to life for all those who do not know Christ. And we do

that all through the simple response of Philip to Nathaniel, “Come and see!” Indeed, come and dwell with us, and through our relationship together, we will glorify Christ together, leaving all assumptions behind. Thanks be to God! Amen and amen.