In Nomine Iesu

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
The followers of the Lamb will see greater things – John 1:35-51

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’ And they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which means teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).

“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 of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come are see.’ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom

there is no deceit!' Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, "I saw you under the fig tree," do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'"

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who bore all our sins away. Dear fellow redeemed:

Nathanael was impressed that Jesus saw him under a fig tree when his friend Philip invited him to come with him and meet Jesus. Who wouldn't be? But Nathanael took it to mean something far greater. He thought that because Jesus miraculously saw him under that tree meant that He must be the promised Messiah. But that proves only that the Nathanael was actively looking for the Messiah to appear. He was one of the faithful of Israel.

I

"You will see greater things than these." What did Jesus mean when He said this to Nathanael? First of all, let us take note that He didn't say this just to Nathanael. He said, "You," you plural, "will see things greater than these." So, who was present there near the end of that day? Philip was certainly present – perhaps Andrew and Peter as well, maybe more. In other words, He was

speaking to His disciples and, through them to the entire church. What do His words mean?

To understand that we need to go back into the Old Testament, all the way back to the first book of the Bible, Genesis. There in the 28th chapter we read:

"And he (Jacob) dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'" (Genesis 28:12-14)

The One who stood above the ladder that Jacob saw was, of course, the same One who created man, male and female, and blessed them, gave them dominion over all creation, and told them to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. He is the same One who then promised our first parents when they had fallen into sin, before they were even parents, that one day the Seed of the woman would crush Satan's head and so undo all the terrible consequences that their sin had brought into the world. This same One many generations later would assure Abraham, the father of Isaac and grandfather of Jacob that his Offspring, the Seed of Eve, would be a blessing not

just to his descendants, but to all the families of the earth. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Now we see this same One speaking to Jacob from heaven in a dream, assuring him that the promise He had once made to Adam and Eve and reiterated to father Abraham, would be fulfilled. He showed him by the vision of angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth that the bond that once existed between God and man would be reestablished someday. Man would one day again experience fellowship and true unity with his Creator. There would be, in other words, a new creation, a new creation in the Christ, the promised One that John the Baptist had urged them to follow.

II

"You will see greater things than these." There can be little doubt that Nathanael, his friend Philip, together with Andrew and Peter, should be counted among the faithful of Israel. That is why Jesus chose them to be some of His first disciples. They looked for the coming of the Seed promised to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob just like Jesus' mother Mary did. They had, at this point, not yet pondered these things as profoundly and for as long as Mary, for she had been pondering this for 30 years after the angel had come to her. But they treasured their relationship to father Abraham too. They treasured the promises given to him about all the descendants he would have, among whom they too knew they were included.

All of them knew what Jesus was referring to when He said, "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." But they

probably didn't grasp the stunning fullness of meaning in the heavenly vision. They probably did not, **yet**.

Perhaps you do not either, **yet**. But you know that Jesus is the Lamb of God. You know that He bore all the sins of the world, including yours. In this you are just like those first disciples who followed John's pointing hand as Jesus, the Lamb of God, walked by, Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathanael. You too know there is more to this Jesus. And some of you know a great deal more, as you have walked with the Christ in preaching and teaching through all the years of your own discipleship. But do you realize that you are seeing these greater things now?

Consider, we celebrated Easter not so many weeks ago. Easter is the greatest of all the church's festivals, greater than Christmas, greater than Pentecost. Christmas flows toward Easter and Pentecost flows from Easter. But make no mistake, Easter is the high point of the Christian faith, the great tower that rises above the Church and sustains her. Because Easter is when not only did a man rise from death, as a few did in the Old Testament and a few in the New. But Easter is when **the Lamb of God,** the One whom John the Baptist pointed out for Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathanael to see, who carried the sins of the world, rose from the dead, rose as the Firstborn of the dead. On that day Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathanael, together with many others began to see the greater things Jesus said they would. Because He rose, as the Apostle Paul would later say, "in order that He might be, the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29) In other words, in order that in Him the new creation would

begin. In Him the Creator would be reconciled to His fallen creation and joined to it once more. The ladder Jacob saw in his dream, with its angels ascending and descending, Jesus assured His first disciples they would see. They would **see**? But they would fall asleep in their guilt and fear when the angel who ministered to Jesus as drops of blood fell from His brow in the Garden of Gethsemane. Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathanael would not even be present when the angels greeted the women, those daughters of Eve, when they gazed into His tomb on Easter morning. But, you see, the angels of God truly were ascending and descending upon Him as He made His way that night to Calvary and as, following His crucifixion and resurrection, He made His way from Calvary. The disciples would not see these things with their eyes, but they would see them with their eyes of faith, just as you have, year after year, Easter after Easter.

You see, all of history is brought together in Christ, from the creation of the world to the end of the world, even as heaven and earth are brought together by Him, for He is the ladder that Jacob saw. He is the One drawing heaven and earth, God and man, together. Again, as the apostle Paul said, "He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and one earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him … and he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." (Colossians 1:15-18) This is what Jesus meant went He said to Nathanael and Philip,

Andrew and Peter, “You will see greater things than these.”

Dear friends, continue walking with Jesus Sunday after Sunday as He also shows you the greater things that He promised you would see, the greatest of which is that you will rise from death to be with Him for eternity.

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These great things you will see by faith, just as all of the faithful of Israel, both of the Old and the New Testament, saw them by faith before you. As you walk with Him, be assured that, “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29) You are the great multitude of stars Abraham once saw, people as numberless as the dust, the one great family of God drawn together in Christ from all the families of the earth. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria