

“You spend so much time trying to fix yourself, just find what makes you happy, go buy a pair of fringe leather pants if that’s what you want.”

Carol, Anne, and I joke that things which get said within the confessional of our lunches stay within those lunches. It’s a bit of a what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas rule. However, I think they both know that they’re having lunch with me and some of those things tend to be free game for sermon inspiration. Carol knows this happened, because she said my opening line at one point this week, just as we were in the midst of conversation about life and being happy, and I immediately stood up and left the room because she had finally sparked what wouldn’t spark...my inspiration.

The fringe leather pants thing I would imagine some of you caught if you love *Friends* as much as Carol and I do, and I know, we just talked about this show like literally two weeks ago, but as you all know the inspiration comes from where it comes from, and here we are. Ross’ leather pants. It started as part of his New Year’s Resolution, that that year Ross was going to try something new every day, and one of those things, inexplicable to anyone else in his life, was buying a pair of leather pants. He said he walked by the store everyday and it always smelled good so finally he was going to buy some. And he looked...ridiculous. This man with a PhD in paleontology with a four year old kid walking around in leather pants

that squeaked when he walked, *but* they made him happy. Now of course, this all devolves into just an absolute world of chaos...at one point the leather pants make him so overheated that he tries to put water on his legs to cool down, only to realize that his muscles have expanded from the heat and those things aren't coming back on ever again. He calls Joey, who encourages powder, lotion, anything he can get his hands on, to the point that Ross is left with pants that will not come back on and his legs covered in a paste that is just everywhere. All for the sake of trying out the leather pants, even if that was like the world's weirdest idea.

And I know, you're wondering where this is going. There was no reference to leather pants in the gospel and honestly as I'm typing this, I'm like Tina, where is this going, but we said last week that sometimes we have to roll with the Holy Spirit and that's what we're trying to do, so take the ride with me today. We'll circle back to the leather pants, but for now let's shift to the gospel, or as I put it the story of Nathanael being the snarkiest snark who ever snarked.

Jesus' ministry is just starting out in our gospel. He's been baptized and now he's realizing he needs to put the pieces together to get started and so he starts calling the disciples. Now, John's version of these stories is vastly different from the other gospels. There are no fishing boats, no

dropping of nets, no being fishers of men. Jesus is just kind of wandering around Bethsaida, which is right on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee, and he's finding people, and extending an invitation. We have Philip, who John points out is from the same the same city as Andrew and Peter who have already met Jesus and signed on for the discipleship thing, and so it's likely that they've told Philip about this Jesus guy, so he's a bit prepped for the follow me invitation, but then there's Nathanael...

Philip decides he's going to be the first evangelist, the first member of a church witness committee. He goes and finds Nathanael and is like, "Listen, we found him. We found the Messiah. We found the one the scriptures and the prophets talked about. Jesus of Nazareth." And God bless Nathanael who apparently has zero filter. Here he has one of his friends telling him completely mind-blowing, world-changing news and his response? "Pssh, can anything *good* come out of *Nazareth*?" I imagine this with like the deepest eye roll known to man. In one sentence, Nathanael has revealed that apparently to people in Bethsaida, Nazareth is some backwater hole with zero potential and is best to be ignored, that he doesn't buy for one second that the Messiah would come from a place like that, so he has some deep messianic expectations, *and* that he has a sarcastic streak that would give mine a run for its money. My sister and I joked that this sentence

would be people from Michigan's equivalent of, can anything good come from *Ohio*? Which we recognize totally also works in reverse, but anyway.

Philip, God bless him, doesn't push the issue. He just offers a simple invitation. You don't believe me? Come see for yourself. Honestly, it should be the motto of every evangelism committee. Zero pressure. Zero expectations, just come and see. But that's a whole other sermon. And what happens next is just...perfect. Jesus matches Nathanael's sarcasm snark for snark. Jesus sees Nathanael and extends his arms and says, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." And of course, Nathanael probably wants on the one hand to be like, "Umm, me?" and on the other like, "Yeah, check this guy out giving me all the compliments here. I *am* that guy. No deceit here." He kind of takes the compliment and is like, "Yeah that's me, but how did you get to know me?" And Jesus just lays it out there, oh I know you because I saw you under the fig tree before you and Philip started talking. Mic. Drop. Because if Jesus saw him *before* they started talking, it's a pretty good chance he saw them *while* they were talking. Which means...Jesus heard *exactly* what Nathanael said, about him, about Nazareth, everything. And so it's a little bit of a test, you're a man of no deceit? Argue that you didn't dismiss me because of where I'm from before

you even met me? And in that moment, Nathanael just gets it. This is him. Philip was right. This is the Messiah, and he's *from Nazareth*.

What I love about this story is that Jesus doesn't then proceed to try and change Nathanael before calling him. He doesn't sit him down and be like, "Look buddy, this was fun, but we gotta talk about this sarcasm and judgment thing before you officially become one of the twelve." Jesus just says, you think that was incredible? You'll see bigger things than that, come along for the ride. There's no pretense, no expectations, just a continuation of that initial invitation, come and see. Walk with me and see what happens. Come as you are and we'll see where the journey takes us.

And thus we circle back to the leather pants and Carol's comment. She said to stop trying to fix yourself and find your joy, which could come in the form of leather pants. But here was the thing about Ross and those leather pants. In some ways, he wanted them to fix him. He had just come off this just absolutely horrendous year, and all his new things, were ways he was trying to reinvent himself, almost make himself into an entirely different person from who he was. He was desperately trying to fix himself, rather than also seeking to find peace with some of the inherent parts of who he was. Geeky paleontologists probably don't wear leather pants and that's ok.

The leather pants weren't just about sparking joy, they were a band-aid to a self-acceptance Ross was desperately trying to find.

I imagine that somewhere in Nathanael's mind, he worried once Jesus revealed that he had heard the whole Nazareth conversation, that he was going to be in for a lecture, a treatise on who he needed to be in order to follow the Messiah, and instead he got the Messiah matching him sarcasm for sarcasm and asking him to come along. Not asking for him to be something different, not asking for him to be anything less than who he was, but to open his eyes to the world around him and see what was happening, without preconceived judgments or expectations. The Messiah had come from Nazareth, just imagine the next thing he would see that would blow his mind!! He just needed to be open to the invitation to see it.

I think so often we feel like we have to fix ourselves in order to be invited into the kingdom of God. And I know, there are probably some of you out there who are like, Pastor Tina, you have preached on this before. And I know I have...and I'm going to keep doing it when the Holy Spirit nudges, or speaks through Carol's voice, because honestly, I'm not sure we can hear it enough. If God can call a snarky, sass-mouthed dude from Bethsaida and not asking him to zip it before he came along, then God can call whomever God wants, exactly as they are. There was no check your

sarcasm at the door sign to discipleship, which means that so many of the hang-ups we all probably have that we think are keeping us separate from God, or that we need to have polished up and shiny before we can fully get into God's good graces, are really just barriers in our own heads that God never put up. The invitation has always been there...come and see. Come see what you find here.

Because the thing is, what we find here, it's going to change us. I guarantee that Nathanael's instinct to judge and hold prejudices changed drastically during his time with Jesus. That's what Jesus does, he changes us, and brings out the best of who we are, and shapes us and molds us and softens our hearts to see the world with gentleness. But that doesn't mean you have to be fixed up and perfect to start the journey. Jesus started the journey with a bunch of middle class, beat-up, simple fisherman from Galilee. He started with Peter who could probably give Nathanael a run for his sarcastic money. He started with John who was about as self-interested as they come. He started with *people*. Simple people. Exactly as they were and who they became in the process was who they were meant to be. Jesus doesn't need your fixed up, shiny, leather pants wearing self for the journey. He just needs you. He just needs you with an open heart and an open mind so when he says, come and see...you follow. **AMEN!!!**