

Out of Nazareth – Homily Jan 18, '09
Deacon Colleen Spaeth

So there was this young gal completing her college app. She comes to the question that asks, “are you a leader?”, “do you see yourself as a leader?”. Being the honest student that she believe herself to be, she answers “no’ in the blank. She is sure that her honesty has probably ruined her chance of getting in.

Imagine her surprise weeks later when she opens the envelop and reads: “Dear applicant, a study of all application forms reveals that this year our college will have 5,000 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel that it is imperative that they have at least one follower.”

In one of the readings this morning we hear Phillip talking to Nathanael. Hey Nat, this is the guy, this is the ONE ! Moses told us he was coming, he is Jesus of

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Nazareth! Now it's not in movie format, it's not on the TV, so we can't see Nat's face, but we can hear that sneer, that judgment in his voice, "what are you talking about, what, are you kidding!?" From Nazareth?! "

This is a newly called follower of Jesus, trying to get more followers of Jesus, and what do we have in Nathanael? We have our first real doubting Thomas. Nathanael is a snot, and Nazareth has made the "worst" list.

Right there with the worst movie, video, worst college, investment, place to live, is Nazareth.

Nathanael's snotty response about Nazareth has helped generation after generation to believe that Nazareth was famous for being infamous.

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Deacon Colleen Spaeth

Of course the real truth is that historically that ain't so. Before our would-be-follower of Jesus of Nazareth, there is not a word anywhere about Nazareth. It was what it was, probably a small, dusty, insignificant village of stone homes struggling to stay afloat.

Nazareth was unremarkable. It wasn't even remarkable for being unremarkable! It was what it was.

That's all it was, until the author of John's gospel remembers good old Nat's dismissal of Nazareth, and makes it the other side of the track type of place.

Can anything good come from Nazareth? It makes one want to squint and sneer, doesn't it? Who wants to come from Nazareth now?

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Deacon Colleen Spaeth

Now, I come from Mt. Holly. If you were to take a ride up 295 north today, and take exit 45 into mt. holly, you wouldn't be very impressed. It was pretty much a Fort Dix suburban town, But now it has lost the downtown I remember. The penny candy store I hung out in on allowance day is gone. The cigar store where the Indian statute stood guard is long gone. The Woolworth store with it's creaky wooden floor and ice cream fountain – long gone.

Truth be told in its heyday, I was from the wrong side of the tracks in Mt. Holly. On my tiny street in the center of town were family after family of struggling blue collar workers, families with what most people judged to be too many kids, where everybody walked to and from work or to the bus stop. It was a hard place to come from, except to those who lived there.

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Deacon Colleen Spaeth

I have complete sympathy for the gossip directed to Jesus repeatedly when he is connected to the downtrodden Nazareth town. After all, can anything from peoples' faces after I left there for more of life.

And here we have Philip trying to convince Nathanael to follow this Jesus, a new leader, looking for followers, who wants to follow this savior born in a bunch of straw in Bethlehem, raised up in the wrong side of the tracks, Nazareth.

And who among us can not say we have felt like we occupied the wrong side of tracks at times in our days?

Some of us may have felt or still feel that our “tracks” are money. We were born genuinely poor.

Out of Nazareth – Homily Jan 18, '09
Deacon Colleen Spaeth

For others those “tracks” have social connotations.

We are in some way not socially “acceptable”, we are too slow, too depressed, too happy, too different, too moody, too strong or weak, too spiritual, too holy, too educated, too uneducated.

Then there’s the physical “tracks”, too fat, too skinny, too ugly, too handicapped, too white, too black/

In our own small circle, our own spirit, our own soul we are all in one way or another coming from our own Nazareth.

In January of 2009 we might hear “can anything good come out of my depleted pension?” can anything good come out of my pink slip?” can anything good come from my spouse’s, my partner’s, my significant other’s

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**death?” “can anything good come from my illness?”
“my cancer”, my child’s addition?” “can anything
good come from the mess in Gaza?” “can anything
good come from a union of a Kenyan black man and a
white woman from the midwest?”**

**I wonder, is it in the worst of times, the worst places
and circumstances that God’s presence is made
known? When I am at my lowest, when I can’t use my
legs any more to walk fast, to move with my kids, to
bowl, to walk on the beach, is God’s light shining at
all, and can I see it, or have I decided to sit in the
dark?**

**When you feel most destroyed, at your worst point,
destitute, disinherited, bankrupt, when we are most**

Out of Nazareth – Homily Jan 18, '09
Deacon Colleen Spaeth

**damned and damaged, then and there could it be that
God wants to do God's greatest work in our lives?**

**Could it be that when a flock of birds fly into the
engines and the plane loses all power that miracles can
be possible?**

**Could it be that just when we think everything is
coming to an end, that everything is really just
beginning, instead of the end, it is the beginning?**

**Could it be when we read Paul talking in Corinthians
of "the word of the cross" that it is really the wisdom
of God? What the world calls and labels the "worst of
the cross" the ultimate tragedy, that is where God did
God's greatest work?**

**Take E. Stanley Jones, one of the greatest missionaries
in Christian history. Born January 3, 1884, at 21 he**

Out of Nazareth – Homily Jan 18, '09
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became a missionary to India where he lived and loved almost until his death in 1973. Jones wrote his final book The Divine Yes, at the age of 83. The age of 83 is not what makes the book remarkable. What makes this story remarkable is the fact that Mr. Jones wrote the Divine Yes after suffering a severe paralyzing stroke. In the last 14 months of his life Mr. Jones was convinced that God wanted him to produce still another book and this “Yes” book was produced even though he was unable to write and hardly able to see or speak. But with the help of his daughter he dictated the book as best he could into a cassette recorder.

It became known as a ‘last will and testament’, Jones called it. The first sentence begins boldly, “Jesus is THE YES, the divine YES.” It was his best selling book, it was clearly written from his “Nazareth”.

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Working “out of Nazareth” is always a dangerous and scary place. When God is up to something in your life, there are two things you can count on, Martin Luther was quoted as saying” where God builds a church the Devil builds a chapel.” Evil is alive and well, and will surely and willingly move in to add more chaos to our crisis.

But the certainty we can hold on to, our lifejacket can be that God will do God’s greatest work in the worst of places. God’s greatest work in the worst of times, in the worst of people. God does God’s greatest work in the worst part of me and you.

In the darkest hole of your spirit, your soul, is where God will send the deepest roots of redemption and

Out of Nazareth – Homily Jan 18, '09
Deacon Colleen Spaeth

**forgiveness. That is where Jesus hangs on the cross
for you and me.**

**When we are at our lowest, our worst point, most
destroyed, bankrupt, most damned and damaged, then
and there... God wants to do God's greatest work in
our lives. When you think everything is coming to an
end, everything is really just beginning.**

**The truth might well be that We all “come out of
Nazareth”.**

Amen.