

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher! Stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle

Fig Tree

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

You don't have to speak a second language to be a translator. All you need is a Bible. For example, take this passage from the Gospel of St. John.

"You are a true Israelite," Jesus said to Nathanael.

"How do you know me?" Nathaniel replied.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree."

This passage doesn't make much sense. *Fig tree?* I saw you under the fig tree? What's that mean?

According to some biblical scholars, this phrase is similar to Jesus saying to Nathaniel, "I saw you under the under the hood of your truck." Or, "I saw you on your front porch."

For the people of Jesus's day, one's fig tree was "a big deal." A fig tree was a sign of ownership, smart investment and responsible stewardship. To own a fig tree meant you owned a piece a land and that piece of land was your part of Promised Land. It was your pride and part of your identity as a Jew.

So, when Jesus says to Nathaniel, "You are a true Israelite," it's the same as saying, "You are solid individual. You are reliable and confident. You are your own person. And I want you on my team."

That's what the phrase "I saw you under the fig tree" actually means. When we ponder this passage today, it is as though Christ is saying to us: "I know where you live. I see you with your family at the dinner table, I know how you interact with your teammates in locker room after the game, I observe how you relate to your co-workers at work in the break room at lunchtime or with your classmates during homeroom.

In other words, "I see you where you are the most yourself. I know where you live. And where you live is where I live. For I live in you and you live in me."

God is not somewhere up the road waiting for us to join him. Rather, he comes to us where we are. Then, as with Nathaniel, he asks us to fall in step with him and follow him to a new Promised Land, an even better Promised Land, a land where fig trees blossom with the fruit of eternal life.