

Sermon 17 January 2021, second Sunday of Epiphany

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We are in a wonderful season of the church year – Epiphany. A time when things about the Son of God are made manifest, they become clear and obvious, like the words on a page when cataracts are removed from our eyes. We can suddenly see; and we begin to understand exactly who the Son of God is and how he can make a difference to our lives in a positive and meaningful way.

In our Gospel reading we meet Nathaniel, a man who's prepared to open his eyes to the world around him and not go through life with his head to the ground. He is invited by Philip to "come and see" Jesus of Nazareth, the one written of by Moses and the Prophets. Nazareth was regarded as a bit of a backwater and we can hear the derision in Nathaniel's words, when he says "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" but his prejudice stops when he realises Jesus was the Son of God, so a new relationship was formed. One that would produce new and exciting opportunities to travel, meet new people and see wonderful acts whilst doing the work of God.

Nathaniel's response to the invitation to "come and see" gave new purpose and meaning to his life. By opening his heart to Jesus, his life was changed.

Jesus first spotted Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree, just waiting and listening. He didn't know what he was waiting for but he was patient. His response to Jesus shows us what it means to be a follower of Christ, he has questions and doubts, yet he responds to the call to "Come and see". He is curious and wants to find out for himself what it involves. Much like Samuel in our first reading, who hears a voice calling him. The boy doesn't know the voice belongs to God, that has to be pointed out to him, but he is willing to be patient and listen before he responding obediently with the words "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening".

The response of Nathaniel and Samuel to God's call is encouragement for us all, their eyes and their hearts were opened and they wanted to know more.

Theirs is the example for us to follow.

I have a very old C of E prayer book which gives a specific instruction before starting prayer:
- Be still and wait for a moment: Christ is looking at you; try to look back at him. Good advice, given as Christians it is right to submit ourselves in humble obedience to the gaze of God, to stand before him and open ourselves to the love and light of Christ.

These moments of closeness to God are especially important in times of difficulty and stress, such as we are going through at present. Changes to our way of living this past year have shaken us to the core and affected our physical and mental well-being; there is light at the end of a long tunnel but it's all very draining. We know that being a Christian doesn't give us a free ticket from pain and hurt, we suffer just as much as anybody. However today's readings show us how having a relationship with Jesus gives us strength and real hope in times of trial. There are times, when we feel alone, lost and unloved, but be encouraged by the words of today's psalm, which speaks of God who has known us and loved us since before we were born. God who never leaves us or forgets us, even when we forget him. We

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are loved us just as we are, in all our sadness and our joy and we should relish in the plans he has for us to use our gifts to prepare for something exciting and much bigger than we could ever imagine, the coming of his kingdom.

Living with God in our lives is more than a Sunday habit, he brings sustenance for our souls, through prayer and receiving Holy Sacrament of communion.

When we accept there is more to life than the every-day grind, and stand before God in faith, we accept his greatest gift. The love that is beyond measure, the love that will never end; the love that will sustain us in all things.

Amen