

## Reflection for the Second Sunday of Epiphany, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021

*1 Samuel 3, Psalm 139, 1 Corinthians 6, John 1*

Can Anything good come out of Nazareth?... Come and See!

Today the gospel reading follows directly on from that wonderful story about Jesus being announced as the long-awaited messiah by John the Baptist and how God the Father confirms John's announcement in the most miraculous way. Having been baptised with water we read that God speaks audibly from heaven and confirms Jesus' ministry with the power of the holy spirit in the form of a dove.

Directly after this we read how Jesus attracts his first disciples. Andrew goes to his brother Simon and tells him that he has found the messiah.

Simon goes to Jesus and astonishingly without any huge conversation Jesus looks at him and instantly 'knows' him.

Jesus recognises who he is in through his father's eyes and perhaps he even has some kind of insight of the role he is going to play in Jesus's story.

And so, Jesus gives Simon a new name 'Peter' the disciple who was to be not only one of his friends but his 'rock'.

Today's lectionary readings and gospel are important not just because we see Jesus calling Phillip and Nathanael into that early band of brothers; but we are being drawn into a revelation of God fulfilling his promises and a revelation about the kind of relationship he wants to have with us. With you and me today.

As I looked at the readings given for all our services I realised that within them there is a very clear and important message about the closeness of God.

In Samuel (1:3 v1-20) and Psalm 139 (V1-6, 13-18) we see that despite our lack of faith and our struggles with accepting the reality of God he still continues to reach into our everyday lives and is gently revealing that he is near, forever drawing us closer to his heart.

The Gospel reading (John 1 v 43-51) brings these messages together and tells us something extremely important.

Jesus chooses Philip and Nathanael; and even when Nathanael doubts, he is overcome by God's continued invitation and decides to take a step of faith and starts an adventure of discovery into God's grace.

Jesus gets that we might struggle and doubt, but the truth is we will never move on from that place of uncertainty unless we answer his call to 'come and see' and experience a life that is renewed by that spirit of love.

The lectionary readings this week therefore for me, suggest that our God is not a distant and disinterested 'god' as so many across the span of history have thought. Rather that he is a God who not only knows you but a God who is constantly singing a love song over you that he hopes will draw you to him. God is seeking us out!

Throughout the Old Testament period, God speaks to Patriarchs, Judges, Prophets, Priests, and Kings; some directly, some via angels, and some via his prophets. He enters covenants with his people, trying to show the world how to live lives that not only honour him but will also lead us into flourishing. In each we hear the creator of the universe pledging his love to us. A love that does not negate our free will but a love that invites us to know him and know him intimately.

The truth is the world (and dare I say, we too sometimes) find this message difficult to hear or comprehend. Yet fact remains that none of this uncertainty changes his desire for us. He has always been, is and will always be calling us to be his chosen ones, his beloved.

When God called Samuel by name, Samuel responded by asking “What do you want me to do?” (v10). This story prompts us to reconsider our own responses to God's love. For any relationship to be real it has to be two way so the question is; if God has chosen and is calling you by name how are you going to respond to him?

I hope that we all might, be brave enough to respond by turning to him and by accepting his loving embrace with an open heart.

That's the response I believe Jesus is asking of us all this morning

To trust and be encouraged that even though we may not think we deserve his love and grace, he knowing all our good and even our hidden not so good parts remains utterly and passionately in love with us anyway.

In Psalm 139, the Psalmist reflects on God knowing each of us intimately. “You have looked deep into my heart Lord and you know all about me.” (v1) “You notice everything I do and everywhere I go.” (v3) “Nothing about me is hidden from you!” (v15) “And when I awake I will find you nearby.” (v18).

If we whole heartedly accept this amazing truth, I wonder what difference, what strength, having such knowledge re-awoken in our hearts could make to how we embrace the world and how we live our day-to-day lives?

When Saint John recalls Jesus choosing his first disciples, those very human, ordinary men, Andrew, and Simon Peter, then Philip and Nathanael. He shows us that it does not matter who you are, what you may have done or where you come from, you are his beloved and if you want to truly find hope then all you need to do is open your heart and together with Christ walk forward and ‘come and see’ what a life with him can bring. It is an invitation into a unique and wonderful adventure of unending grace.

So as we travel onwards through all the unknowing and challenges of the next few days and coming weeks, may we all remember to turn our hearts back to him each day; ask for the renewed indwelling of his spirit to give us strength, and stand firm in the knowledge that however tough things may seem, we are all called, chosen, loved and cherished by a God who is as close to us as our own breath, a God who's greatest delight is the nearness of us, and that our God promises that however tough things might seem he will never fail or leave us alone! Amen.