

John 1:43-51 – Epiphany 2 1 Samuel 3.1-10, (11-20); Psalm 139.1-6,13-18; 1 Corinthians 6.12-20;

I want to begin today by asking – ‘what does it mean to ‘be’ in the place where you are and what does it mean for you - to ‘be’....

Is it about being as busy as you can because you feel you are achieving something – the outcome is tangible?

Is it about being busy and trying to fit in some quiet time with God along the way – but putting it off if it doesn’t come off?

Or is it about making time for quiet time where you are consciously sitting with God to allow yourself to hear the still small voice calling you on – as Samuel did - and to experience a deep connected energy to fill up within you and overflow into our daily life – as Nathaniel did – so that it becomes fuelled by God’s energy and grace – God’s world and ours becomes united through the central energy within us that we call the Holy Spirit...

Bishop Jo’s sermon is well worth listening to as she speaks more about this and asks of us ‘Which world is most real to you, and how do you bear witness to it?’

*She goes on to say that Witness is about living in such a way that my life does not make sense without the ultimate reality, the essence, the greater things.’* And she invites us to ask ourselves, ‘what in my life would not make sense without that other world? She reminds us that Samuel became a prophet - the Bible’s archetype of someone who lives in such a way that their life does not make sense if God did not exist. They are those who speak for God – and who voice God’s truth no matter what it costs - and at the same time, point to Jesus.

With everything happening in the world of pandemic – in our own worlds and beyond – with the physical, emotional and social changes – being apart from loved ones and being restricted and anxious and vulnerable – it is easy to not realise the impact it collectively has on our spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing and energy. We need to care for it all but actually – by taking care of the spiritual – the inner foundation – we can then frame our world so that it is fuelled with energy that is sustainable and overflowing regardless of outer conditions.

And for our St Peter’s community Church – doors open or closed - being part of a church family – no matter how paused the physical connection is – can still have a spiritual connection that transcends all that – because it is about being connected to the fuel – the spirit of life – of all life – the body of Christ of which our hands and feet are all a part...

We have all got to this place on our faith journey in one way or another – and today we hear about Nathaniel’s journey...

‘What are you looking for?’ These are the first words spoken in the Gospel of John by Jesus to two disciples of John the Baptist. ‘Where are you staying’ they asked – ‘Come and see’ invites Jesus. They follow.

Andrew then finds his brother Simon and tells him that ‘We have found the Messiah – the anointed’ and, upon bringing Simon to Jesus, he is told ‘You are to be called Cephas’ – that is, Peter.

The next day, Philip was ‘found’ by Jesus who told him to follow, and he did. Philip then went on to find Nathaniel, telling him that ‘we’ have found ‘him’ whom Moses and the prophets wrote.

Those early disciples found Jesus compelling. In John’s Gospel, there is no background to Jesus – it wasn’t needed – there was something about him that drew people to him.

Then we witness Nathaniel’s encounter with Jesus following Philip’s confession....

John’s Gospel very clearly makes sure the readers know that Jesus is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy. From the beginning we hear of a Jesus who is Rabbi – teacher – who baptises with the Holy Spirit and who is the Son of God....

We are also hearing of an incarnate God. People talk about the mystical Gospel of John – but John's Jesus is earthy and very much on the ground. We are told that Jesus has an earthly father, Joseph who is from Nazareth. And this leads to that statement from Nathaniel – 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' But even as he is saying that, Nathaniel is beginning to walk towards Jesus in response to Philip's invitation to 'come and see'....

Jesus then identifies Nathaniel as 'an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' He is without guile – he doesn't lie – so perhaps Nathaniel's statement about anything good coming out of Nazareth is a genuine and honest question – can anything good come from there? If there is, he genuinely doesn't know of any.....

However, he begins to wonder when Jesus shows Nathaniel that he already knew him before now and that he had seen him under the fig tree before Philip had called him.

The fig tree traditionally denotes a place where Rabbis study the Torah – perhaps Nathaniel and Jesus are being made known to the other through the scriptures – through the Word – and ultimately through the Word made flesh.....

Jesus promises Nathaniel that 'You will see greater things than these..' And Jesus is actually only addressing Nathaniel here – the 'you' is a singular pronoun in the original Greek text...

But then everyone becomes included in the following promise of Jesus – 'Verily truly I tell you, you will see the heavens open and the messengers of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' The 'you's' here are plural pronouns as Jesus refers to the ascending / descending ladder that was in Jacob's dream in Genesis (28:10-17) Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth.

Nathaniel began to follow when he knew he was known by Jesus.... Perhaps being recognised – having a sense of identity and belonging – and having someone who knows their name and cares is at the very heart of the longing of so many people today who and would be something truly worth following....

Perhaps what they – and you – and me - are looking for today is the way home – home to the place in which we find a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging and identity and a sense of peace – even amidst the storms of life...

'Where are you staying' the disciples earlier ask of Jesus – 'Come and See' he replies....

What we can learn from Nathaniel – and take out into our communities with conviction – is that through Jesus Christ God stays everywhere..... Wherever we believe, he stays – but wherever there is doubt he stays also, albeit hidden from view. He stays with us – alongside us – within us – around us – regardless of who we are and what we think of him...

T.S. Elliot wrote:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time

When we gather again – communities of church building and online – we might discover that we are venturing into something new - yet at the same time coming home to something profoundly old...

'What are you looking for?' is a question asked, not only of those early disciples but of all of us and in this week of Christian Unity never has there been such a poignant question and need for a Gospel that unites in diversity and offers a way in which people can truly live alongside ourselves and each other in fellowship and peace that comes from knowing and being known by God through Jesus Christ and by stepping into his world and making that world our reality.

*'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Nathaniel asked - Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'*