

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 17th January 2021

Sunday Worship

with Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you are keeping well and are coping okay with the current restrictions. Today, our Gospel Reading is John 1:43-51. Here, we read the story of Philip and Nathanael's surprise encounter with Jesus and we hear of how they respond in different ways to him. Our Old Testament reading is 1 Samuel 3:1-10 which is about the calling of Samuel.

Let us worship God together:

Call to worship

We have come together into the presence of our Lord.

So, let us quieten our hearts and minds,

put aside our concerns and distractions.

Let us open ourselves to listen for God's voice,

for the word God has for his people.

A gathering prayer

Almighty God, you speak to us in so many ways.

Help us, in our worship today, to hear your voice and know it is you.

Speak to us in the silence, through Scripture and by the Spirit.

Speak through others and through your creation,
through images, experiences, music and encounters.

Speak in ways that we can understand.

So, speak, Lord – and help us to listen.

Amen.

Hymn Be still, for the presence of the Lord (BPW 5)

Be still,

for the presence of the Lord,

the Holy One, is here;

come bow before Him now

with reverence and fear:

in Him no sin is found

we stand on holy ground.

Be still,

for the presence of the Lord,

the Holy One, is here.

Be still,

for the glory of the Lord

is shining all around;

He burns with holy fire,

with splendour He is crowned:

how awesome is the sight

our radiant King of light!

Be still,

for the glory of the Lord

is shining all around.

Be still,
 for the power of the Lord
 is moving in this place:
 He comes to cleanse and heal,
 to minister His grace —
 no work too hard for Him.
 In faith receive from Him.
 Be still,
 for the power of the Lord
 is moving in this place.

David J Evans
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A prayer of confession

Lord, we come before you to say sorry. Sorry for all the times we've let you, ourselves and others down. Sometimes, Lord, we're so busy talking and doing that we fail to hear you. We miss the still small voice saying, 'Stop. Listen.' Lord, we're sorry for being too busy to hear you. You speak in so many different ways, Lord, one being through other people – but very often we take no notice and continue in our own way. Help us to tune in to your voice.

Lord, as you use others to speak to us, so you use us to draw people to you. But speaking does not always require words. People see our lives, our attitudes and character. Lord, we're sorry for the times we've let you down in these areas – when we pressurise others to conform to our ideas, or fail to listen and give others the space to draw closer to you.

Lord, as we spend these few moments in personal reflection, we ask you to speak to us. Show us anything for which we need to say sorry – and change our ways.
 Lord, we lift our confessions to you, in your precious name.

Assurance of forgiveness

Father God, we thank you that we don't have to earn your forgiveness.
 It is not based on how worthy we are.
 We are forgiven through Christ Jesus.
 It is by grace that our sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God! Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Thank you, Lord, that you know us and can see our potential
 – for you know who we are created to be.

We thank you for all the people you have placed in our lives,
 parents, teachers, guardians, family, friends, whoever they may be,
 people who have made real difference.

We thank you for the blessings of relationships,
 but most of all for our relationship with you.
 Help us to bless others in your name.

Thank you, Lord, that when we are hurt, confused or unsure about something or someone,
 we can come to you – thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance.
Lord, our hearts are lifted by your presence in our lives.
All glory to you with thanks and praise.
Amen.

Old Testament Reading**1 Samuel 3:1-10 (NRSV)***Samuel's Calling and Prophetic Activity*

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. ⁶ The Lord called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Gospel Reading**John 1:43-51 (NRSV)***Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael*

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' ⁵¹ And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

Reflection

Our Gospel reading today is part of a longer story of the calling of the first disciples. If we were to read from John 1:19, we would see that John tells the story of Jesus' mission in a 'one day at a time' mode: we read, 'the next day' in 1:29, 1:35 and again at the start of today's reading in verse 43. The day before, it had been a special day for Andrew and another disciple, as they, along with Simon Peter, had found, and started following, Jesus. Today, we see that Jesus is reaching out to others now and he finds Philip. In fact, as new disciples begin to follow Jesus, there's quite a lot of 'finding' going on here, isn't there? Some disciples find each other, and others are found by Jesus. Andrew expresses this whole new relationship, this whole new way of life, as he says in 1:41, 'we have found the Messiah'. Perhaps this 'finding' indicates that they grasp the importance of dynamically engaging with Jesus' mission.

That said, we discover that this wonderful, dynamic process seems to snag when Philip finds Nathanael! Nathanael does *not* jump up, leave everything and follow Jesus, does he!? Instead, he chooses to challenge Philip: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Surely, the Messiah is not going to come from this type of town! In Philip's response are the same words of invitation that Jesus has said to Andrew and the other disciple, just the day before: 'come and see' (1:39). It's fascinating to note that the Greek word 'see' is rich in meaning and carries not only the sense of physically seeing what is happening, but when used by John in his Gospel, it implies perception, the ability to perceive, to understand the significance of events, and of course, the significance of Jesus, the 'word made flesh' (1:14), God's only Son (3:16) who is being revealed before them and in whom they are drawn to believe (2:10).

For Nathanael, though, it is not seeing but hearing that overcomes his hesitancy about Jesus. It is as Jesus speaks with him that he discovers one who amazingly knows far more about him than he could ever have expected. As Nathanael approaches him, Jesus says, 'here is truly an Israelite in whom there is

no deceit!’ Jesus then tells Nathanael that he had seen him ‘under the fig tree’ even before Philip had introduced them to each other, revealing his God given insight that others do not have. Well, that does it for Nathanael, he is totally transformed by this talk and he honours Jesus: ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ This life changing encounter ends with encouragement as Jesus promises much more: ‘very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’ These words combine images from the descent of the ‘Son of Man’ in Daniel 7:13 and Jacob’s dream ladder in Genesis 28:12. Jesus, as the ‘Son of Man’, becomes the place where the earthly and heavenly meet; he is the one who removes the barrier between God and humanity. This is a poignant moment, full of meaning and it is all the more significant because it is the first time that Jesus says such things about himself.

These wonderful stories remind us that our discipleship is not passive, but active, an active engagement with Jesus. As we see, John 1:19-51 is almost all dialogue and this means that the readers, both then and now, become what Theologian Gail O’Day aptly calls ‘participants in the drama of discipleship’. We become ‘the audience’ to John’s testimony. As O’Day writes we are ‘able to hear Jesus’s initial question to the first disciples, ‘who are you looking for’ (1:38) as a question addressed to the readers as well.’ We hear about a wonderful variety of people talking about Jesus and we can consider for ourselves, how we will respond to Jesus’ invitation ‘to come and see’? Today, we are invited to move beyond just being blessed by stories about discipleship; John invites us to share in the call to discipleship. I love O’Day’s helpful observation that ‘these stories are dominated by verbs: *follow, see, seek, stay, find.*’ In this use of verbs, we are reminded once again that our discipleship, our following of Jesus is active and involves interacting with him. At the moment, in this pandemic and in this necessary lockdown, we may need to be open to the Spirit and be creative regarding how we might be active. Certainly, we need to be kind to ourselves when our familiar ways of following Jesus are simply not possible. But still, encouraged by the openness of God to us all because of Jesus, let us find God in this moment, be open to his leading and actively follow him as we are able. Amen.

A short prayer

We thank you, God, for those times when we have sensed your presence, heard your voice, seen new insights, particularly when we have needed those things. Yet some of us, Lord, can’t remember ever hearing your voice. Teach us how to make space for you, how to hear you and to recognise your loving presence with us, and how not to get in the way of others finding you. We ask for Jesus’ sake. **Amen.**

Our prayers of intercession

Come and see,
and join in praying for the people of the world waiting to hear good news.

Loving God, we pray for the states of America to be united in the days and weeks ahead. We pray for an end to violence, for wisdom and protection for President-elect Joe Biden and all who will take office in a few days’ time. We pray for those threatening to disrupt the inauguration, and for the police force and those entrusted with keeping the law and peace.

Lord, hear our prayer and draw us all closer to you.

We pray for those around the world at the mercy of extreme weather conditions. We pray for the people of Japan, of Indonesia, especially those rescue workers who died trying to save others, for those bereaved in the plane crash, for those in our own country without power and heat. We pray for those tackling the climate change challenges of our time and for our own response in our day to day lives.

Lord, hear our prayer and draw us all closer to you.

We pray for all who are pushed to their limits at work and at home, for Intensive Care Staff, for all in the emergency services, for GP’s, teachers and school staff, for parents and students, for all whose mental health is at breaking point. We pray for our Government and all whose decisions affect millions of lives. And we pray for one another as we respond to the restrictions locally and nationally.

Lord, hear our prayer and draw us all closer to you.

We pray for those whose businesses are closed, whose shops are locked up, whose rooms have no guests, for those whose money is running out, for those on the brink of despair.

Lord, hear our prayer and draw us all closer to you.

We pray for your church, entrusted with the good news of Jesus, and charged with serving all those in need. We pray for hospital chaplains, for those ministering to the bereaved, and for one another as we seek to share our faith and our hope in Jesus Christ.

Lord, hear our prayer and draw us all closer to you.

We pray for one another, our families, our community, our church fellowship.

May we support those who are unwell or grieving.

We pray for all those among us who have sadly lost loved ones recently.

We think of Kathy and her family following the loss of her dear mother-in-law.

We will hold the family in our prayers on Tuesday morning, the time of the Funeral Service.

We think also of Adrian and Stephanie and the family.

We pray for those who are unwell, thinking especially of

Joan, Chikondi, Phyllis Davies, Doreen, Brian, Irene,

Re-Anette's mother, and all her family in South Africa.

May they all know your love, peace and healing presence in their time of need.

Lord, hear our prayer and draw us all closer to you.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come; thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
 should set his love upon the human race,
 or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
 to bring them back, within the fold of grace.

But this I know, that he was born of Mary,
 when Bethlehem's manger was his only home,
 and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
 and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
 as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
 or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
 the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.

But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
 and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
 and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
 for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
 how he will claim his earthly heritage,
 how satisfy the needs and aspirations
 of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
 But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
 and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
 and some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour,
 when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
 when, at his bidding, every storm is stilled,
 or who can say how great the jubilation
 when all the hearts of earth with love are filled.
 But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
 and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
 and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
 'At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!'

William Y. Fullerton. (1857-1932)

A sending out prayer

Lord, what we have learned this day – help us remember.
 Teach us to recognise your voice.
 Teach us how to see you in our lives and encounters.
 Help us to give others space so that they may hear you too.
Amen.

The Blessing

May the blessing of almighty God,
 Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
 be upon you and those you love, this day and always.
Amen.

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:
**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
 be with us all,
 for evermore. Amen.**

May God bless you richly, with our love and best wishes to you and your families,

Neil

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