

SUNDAY 17th January 2021 – Epiphany 2

Hymn

1. Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

2. I am the Lord that healeth thee.
I am the Lord that healeth thee.
I am the Lord that healeth thee.

3. In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

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Opening Words

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Psalm 139

God, you search me and know me.
Before I sit, you know when I will rise.

**God, you search me and know me.
Before I speak, you know what I will say.**

God, you search me and know me,
in my joy and despair,
in my breathing in and breathing out.

**God, you search me and know me.
Your knowledge is too deep to reach,
too vast to comprehend.**

God, you search me and know me.
Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Confession

**Most merciful God,
we confess to you,
before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.**

First Reading

Read by Michaela McNeil

I Samuel 3.1-20

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.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 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. Then the LORD called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' 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. 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.' Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' Then the LORD said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house for ever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever.'

Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, 'Samuel, my son.' He said, 'Here I am.' Eli said, 'What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.' So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, 'It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him.'

As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD.

Response

Gentle and patient

God, you are calling.

Careful and persistent
God, you are calling.

In grieving and in praise
God, you are calling.

Through dawn and midday
God, you are calling.

Unexpected and planned
God, you are calling.

In a still small voice and in power
God, you are calling.

Spontaneous and prepared
God, you are calling.

Willing or protected
God, you are calling.

Our God is eager to share with us,
wherever we are in our journey.
May we be diligent to listen.
God, you are calling.

Second Reading

John 1.43-end

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come

and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' 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

By the Rev'd Robert Dolman (Retired Methodist Minister and part of the Church in Toft)

We know that Rupert Brooke, the First World War poet, thought Grantchester was in a different league from other local villages. He could not forget its peace and quiet, the beauty of the elms and the shady chestnut trees, the golden corn fields, the brook and the mill, and the straightforwardness of the men and women and the attractiveness of the little children who lived there. He remembered with pleasure glancing at the Church clock standing at ten to three and relishing honey to come at tea time.

Go-compare could have found no other village to match its charms: 'Barton men make Cockney rhymes And Coton's full of nameless crimes And things are done you'd not believe At Madingley on Christmas Eve.' That spirit of local rivalry is even now not quite dead. I can imagine some seasoned worthy from Toft muttering, 'Can any good thing come out of ?' – well, finish the sentence for yourself.

Nathanael was in this sceptical frame of mind when his friend Philip began to wax enthusiastic about a new teacher he had met. Philip claimed excitedly, 'We have found the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote. He is called Jesus and he is the son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael, who came from Cana in Galilee, could not imagine anything more improbable than that such a tinpot little

place should be the springboard for any genuine spiritual movement. So, he asked dismissively, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Come off it, Philip'

Philip invited Nathanael to experience the compelling power of Jesus; come and see for yourself. And as he approached Jesus the wind was rather taken out of Nathanael's sails. Without any introduction, Jesus immediately commended Nathanael as a genuine Israelite, one in whom there was no deceit, no guile. Nathanael was not like the tricky religious leaders with whom Jesus would clash so frequently and so bitterly. Neither was he like the father of Israel, the patriarch Jacob, a rather dodgy character who cheated his elder brother Esau out of his birthright and out of the blessing of their old father, Isaac. No, Nathanael was a true Israelite, an ardent searcher of the scriptures with a deep faith. Jesus read the secrets of his heart and saw in him a man truly enlightened and dedicated to God.

Nathanael naturally wanted to know why Jesus had formed this opinion of him. Jesus said that already before Philip had come on the scene he had watched Nathanael sitting under the fig tree. Many houses in Israel would have had a fig tree growing outside and the spacious canopy provided an extra room and this was a private place traditionally associated with pondering the scriptures, and with prayer.

Nathanael was deeply moved by what Jesus said about him. His prejudice melted away and he spontaneously blurted out, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.' In that moment the eyes of a true Israelite were opened to see the glory of the one who was to be God's new Israel.

But who was Nathanael? He does not appear at all in Matthew, Mark or Luke. And in St John from this encounter at the beginning of Jesus' ministry right through to the Crucifixion there is no further mention of him. But then all of a sudden he reappears. In St John ch 21 the evangelist records how Jesus made his third resurrection appearance by the Sea of Tiberias and amongst

those present were Simon Peter, James and John, Thomas and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee.

Nathanael who stood by the lakeside among the leading apostles must have been amongst the close followers of Jesus. A long tradition identifies him with the disciple Bartholomew. This is possible since Bartholomew is a kind of surname, meaning son of Tolmai: so, was Nathanael, son of Tolmai? Whether that's so or not Nathanael had, as Jesus promised, seen greater things. He had seen Jesus at work in the power of the Spirit in the towns and villages of Galilee. He had witnessed the electrifying power of his preaching to the ordinary people who heard him so gladly: he had heard his announcing of God's kingdom in mind-blowing parables; his call to repentance, a change of mind and life; his forthright confronting of the political and the religious authorities; his radical questioning of conventional ideas; his stabbing new insights into scripture; his embracing of a leper; his hospitable welcome to publicans and sinners; his friendship with women, his valuing of little children. Nathanael had seen people's lives changed, watched them give up their cherished securities and material wealth to follow Jesus. He had seen the shedding of tears as the words of Jesus penetrated deeply into hearts and minds, assuring people that the sins that had disfigured their lives were forgiven and wiped away. He had seen the spontaneous joy of those whose darkened minds had been enlightened and the new freedom of those whose crippled bodies had been made straight or whose blind eyes had been opened. Yes, Nathanael had seen greater things.

But there was much more. He had perhaps been near enough to the events on the hill called Calvary to hear passers-by taunting the dying Jesus, chanting the refrain, 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross,' and the priests and the scribes and the soldiers all mocking him, 'If you're the King of the Jews, come down from the Cross and save yourself.' And did Nathanael get near enough to read the inscription on the Cross, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, the title he himself had used in that first encounter?

Certainly the words that Jesus said to him, 'You will see greater things than these,' had been fulfilled. One contemporary theologian has written, Our truest picture of God is the crucifixion of Jesus. For the rest of his life Nathanael pondered its meaning. Jesus told Nathanael he would see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. There is an echo of Jacob here again. Jacob had dreamt of a ladder reaching up to heaven. But now the means of communication between heaven and earth is Jesus, the Son of Man, who came down to earth from heaven to draw all people by way of the Cross into the Father's heart.

And Nathanael was an amazed witness of the Resurrection. He learned that the love of God could not be finally be defeated by death and that the grace of God was let loose in all the world. We don't know what part Nathanael played in subsequent events but we do see him as one of the first witnesses to the greatest things of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

But what does this story at the beginning of the Gospel say to us? We must face the reality that many people are asking a question rather like the one Nathanael did. Religion and its institutions have been pushed to the margins. It has been conventional wisdom that religious beliefs are matters for private individuals and should have no sway in the public square. Religious institutions are confidently believed to be destined for unstoppable statistical decline, and they are frequently discredited by the gross and abusive conduct of those entrusted with positions of leadership. They are increasingly ignored by the media, and understanding of what they are about grows thinner and vaguer by the year. Even some of their members are disillusioned by their performance. The Church seems, as Nazareth did to Nathanael, an unlikely source of truth, wisdom and power for modern people. Can any good thing come out of it? the cynic asks. And the cynic may be either the wiseacre in the village pub or the scientist or philosopher in the Senior Common Room.

This is a call for the Church to dig deeper, to be more thoughtful and more prayerful, more willing to explore the vast riches of Christ and to see clearly greater things in him than heart or mind have yet conceived. There is a case for saying that one major thing that is wrong with the Church at the moment is that it is desperately preoccupied with its own vital statistics, with its own very survival, rather than with the mystery of Jesus. We also have to venture beyond superficial respectability to something altogether more authentic, perhaps more disturbing. Giving real attention to other people in the form of love and giving real attention to God in the form we call prayer could make a real difference to our world. It would certainly make a real difference to us. We need to heed the call of Philip to come and see, and to claim the promise of Jesus that there are greater things yet to be seen.

If you want a simple phrase to sum it up, listen to this paragraph from *The Last Battle*, the conclusion of C S Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, which well describes the spiritual journey that Nathanael made: 'I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. Come further up, come further in.'

'Come further up, come further in.' See greater things. The invitation is for you and me – whether we live in Grantchester or even in Barton, Coton or Madingley.

Prayers of Intercession

Led by Deborah Spencer

[If using this at home by yourself you may wish to use your own intercessions, praying for the needs of the community, the church and the world, or the following:

*We pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
You sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to the captives*

*and salvation to your people:
anoint us with your Spirit;
rouse us to work in his name.*

Father, by your Spirit

bring in your kingdom.

*Send us to bring help to the poor
and freedom to the oppressed.*

Father, by your Spirit

bring in your kingdom.

*Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.*

Father, by your Spirit

bring in your kingdom.

*Send us to those who mourn,
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.*

Father, by your Spirit

bring in your kingdom.

*Send us to proclaim that the time is here
for you to save your people.*

Father, by your Spirit

bring in your kingdom.

*Father, use us, unworthy as we are,
to bring in your kingdom of mercy, justice, love and peace.*

*Empower us by your Spirit and unite us in your Son,
that all our joy and delight may be to serve you,
now and for ever.*

Amen.]

On zoom we use the response:

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

At the end..

Merciful Father...

Accept our prayers for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

The Collect

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

Blessing

Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory
and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom;
and the blessing ...

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ, Amen.