

**Sermon, Second Sunday in Epiphany,
Brookton and Beverley, 14th January, 2024**

Throughout the readings set for today there is a clear message: God knows us. The beautiful words of Psalm 139 assure us we are no accident, that the Lord has known us intricately even as He knit us together in our mothers' wombs. The Lord's call to the young Samuel reminds us that even before we know Him, He knows us well enough to have a plan in place for us. In the gospel our Lord Jesus speaks of Nathanael in a way that reveals He shares this knowledge of us all with His Heavenly Father. In effect, God knows us inside out, but even more excitingly than that, the gospel reveals that He wants us and others to know Him as well.

We might find that level of knowing someone scary. For surely, we are masters of disguise when it comes to holding back those bits of ourselves we don't think others would like. Very few people feel confident enough to show themselves completely to everybody they meet; because most of us fear rejection and lost affection if we show our true selves completely. In reality, the closer we get to someone the more we reveal, but even then, there are limits with most of us protecting those dark little nooks and crannies that lie beneath the surface; sinful thoughts and longings, the shame and regret of the dark moments in our past, the anxieties and uncertainties with which we struggle. We cover these over in all sorts of ways. Therefore, the thought that God sees through our self-styled barriers and knows us without limit is pretty confronting, isn't it?

We are not speaking of some sort of superficial knowledge here. God knows our sinful nature and yet forgives us. What's more, He still sent His Son to die for our sins. All our fears that if God really knew what we were like, He wouldn't want anything to do with us are unfounded. Jesus' birth, His life and death prove that despite knowing us perfectly (good and bad) God still shows His love for us without limit. He sees through the facade of respectability we build around ourselves. Through the fig trees we take shelter under He still wants to grab hold of us for eternity.

It may seem a little disturbing to know that our Lord Jesus can see right through us-and along the way see everything we try to hide inside of us. This divine perception is only frightening when we foolishly keep trying to hide something from Him. Jesus came for the purpose of cleansing us of all our sins, that task was as good as done as soon as our Lord was baptised. When He was baptised, He took upon Himself all those sins you feel like you need to hide, and after carrying them for three years or so, Jesus killed all of those sins by dying on the cross with them.

Our natural human condition is one in which we try to justify ourselves before God and prove our worth. Please note that Jesus did NOT say Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite, in whom there is no sin." Jesus is much more interested in your honesty about your sins-which is the flip side of faith. Jesus said to Nathanael, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" That is, one who recognises his need for a Saviour. Jesus knows us, so why try, and hide anything from Him? He knows us and still He comes as our Saviour to deal with the sin and guilt that lies within us all. As St. John explains in another place, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9). As we confess here publicly, as well as privately, we reveal what is hidden and Jesus deals with it – robbing sin of its power and remaking us through His forgiving love. Why? In order that He can restore the relationship with God perfectly, and eternally.

Jesus knows all people intimately. The sad reality is, not all people know Him in the way He revealed Himself to Nathanael. Not all people know Him as the Saviour who longs to forgive our sins and claim us as His own. Philip came to know Jesus – he recognised Jesus as Saviour and Lord and so he invited others to come and see Jesus as well, so they might know Him too. I wonder how many times we hesitate to invite people to meet Jesus in this way. Perhaps we don't see the urgency of it – we'll just wait for the right time, we think. How often don't we hesitate to speak those words of invitation? To family, children, grandchildren? To our friends? To our colleagues? We hesitate for all sorts of reasons – not the least of which is timing, and our worry about having the right words to say. Philip doesn't wait for either of these things. He simply bowls up to Nathanael who is sitting

quietly under the fig tree and invites him to come and see Jesus, ie to meet this Friend and Saviour of sinners. Jesus made Philip a disciple in the wink of an eye, simply by speaking His word, "Follow Me." That was enough to re-create and strengthen the gift of faith that Philip had learned from his earliest lessons in Scriptures. By the power of Jesus' speaking, Philip believed and followed Him.

The same miracle-producing power that was in Jesus' mouth now entered Philip's mouth. When Philip went to Nathanael and said, "We have found Him of whom *[we learned about in Sunday School]*," Philip was not speaking mere information to Nathanael. Philip was speaking the same divine Word of forgiveness and life to Nathanael that Jesus first spoke to him when He said to Philip, "Follow Me." In Philip's speaking, Jesus exerts His faith-producing power over Nathanael. In Philip's speaking, the miracle of faith and hope and eternal life burrows deeper into Nathanael's heart and mind. In Philip's speaking, God performed a miracle that produced faith in Nathanael and brought him the gift of eternal life. Surely, the Holy Spirit at work!

So, it is with our speaking of the Word as well. We may feel powerless to speak to others about Jesus. We may feel that we don't really know what to say. May I suggest, say it anyway! Philip didn't create a fancy theological treatise or a polished sermon manuscript or a lofty argument. In fact, you might observe, Philip didn't really do all that much at all. The best he could muster was, "We've heard about this guy before, and I think you should meet Him."

Each of us has met this same Lord because someone said to us, 'Come and see Jesus.' Whether it was our parents bringing us to the font as a baby and lovingly dragging us along to worship, or a friend in later life who dared to say, 'come along'. The result is the same. The Lord knows and loves us, and by His grace we know Him as our Friend and Saviour. God grant us His Spirit so that we may rejoice in this knowledge and share it with those around us.