

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018: SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY. YR B

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10(11-20); Ps 139:1-5,12-18

Gospel John 1:43-51

“Come and See”

A minister was walking to church one morning when he passed one of his members working in his garden. "Can't you hear those bells calling you to church?" asked the minister.

"Eh, what's that?" said the member.

"Can't you hear those bells calling you to church?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to speak a little louder!" said the member.

"CAN'T YOU HEAR THOSE BELLS CALLING YOU TO CHURCH?!" shouted the minister.

"I'm sorry," said the member, "I can't hear you because of those darned BELLS!"

**May I speak in the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through the written word and the spoken word, may we know your living word, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

This week we are hearing about the opening days of Jesus' ministry, and here we find Jesus gathering a group of disciples around him. We throw that word around a lot, "disciples," and I thought maybe I'd better look it up in the dictionary just to be sure I understood what it meant. The word disciple: I thought it meant, basically, "follower," and that's true, as far as it goes. But what interests me even more than definitions are 'knowing', and —I love knowing, in effect, who are the parents of a word. "Disciple" comes from a Latin word that means "pupil," but that word comes from two different words that mean, "to take apart." So, a disciple is a follower, but one who has taken apart the teachings of the teacher, and found them to be sound, and is following on that basis. A disciple is someone who has done her/his homework.

Jesus is inviting people to follow him, to become disciples. His exchange with Philip is simple: "Follow me." And Philip follows. Like any good follower, Philip tries to find other people to follow too—maybe he is shy about enlisting in the Jesus movement all by himself. Or, maybe, he sees in Jesus the answer to a question he

knows Nathanael is asking already, a question something like, “Where is the Messiah?”

Whatever his reasoning, he drafts Nathanael to come along.

Nathanael is sceptical. His scepticism has to do with what he already knows about Jesus. “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he asks. I have heard similar responses when I invited people to come to my previous Church Community that I was a priest with. Can anything good be happening in Rydalmere? There’s really only one good answer to a question like that. “Come and see,” says Philip.

We might wonder why on earth Nathanael should be so sceptical about Nazareth. Well, let’s just say, it’s pretty much Nowheresville, Palestine. It’s small. It’s unimportant. It is not mentioned in the bible (Philip and Nathanael’s bible, that’s the Old Testament to you and me). It’s not mentioned as centre of worship, or a place from where the Messiah will come, for instance. It’s not mentioned at all, until the Christian (that is, the New) Testament. Saying someone is “from Nazareth” is not a ringing endorsement.

But Nathanael goes along with Philip, little knowing the kind of person he is about to encounter. Jesus’ opening salvo to Nathanael is playful. It’s challenging. The first thing Jesus says to Nathanael is “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Jesus is playing with words here. The word “Israel” is another name for “Jacob,” whose name means “leg-puller,” as in, “Are you pulling my leg?” Jesus is telling Nathanael, “Hey, I know where you come from, and I’m not judging you.” He is implying, of course, that he knows full well how sceptical Nathanael is, and that it’s fine, it’s cool.

Nathanael is taken aback. “Um, have we met?” he asks. “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus tells him, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Now, this is the first we have heard of a fig tree in John’s gospel. And it is possible Jesus saw Nathanael under a literal fig tree at some point. But one thing we should take into consideration any time we read the gospel of John is that he speaks quite often in symbols and metaphors. In Jewish lore, it is believed that the tree of knowledge of good and evil from Genesis—the tree that got the first man and woman and serpent in so very much trouble—it is believed that it was a fig tree. And, for that reason, Jewish scholars engaged in studying scripture were said to be “gathering figs.” Jesus is saying to Nathanael, “I know you’re a fig gatherer. I know you’ve been doing your homework. I know you won’t just go along to get along, or follow along to be a pal. I know who you are, and what matters to you. And so I say to you what Philip said: Come and see.” And Nathanael does. Oh, he does go and see indeed!

God’s all up in Nathanael’s business, as evidenced by Jesus knowing, uncannily, unsettlingly, exactly who he is and what he is and what will help him to know where and how he is called. My question is this: what helps us to know who we are and

what we are and where and how we are called to participate in God's work? If we take the words of the psalm seriously, we believe that God has searched us and known us, every last darn thing there is to know about us. But how does that translate to us knowing where and what and how God wants us to be in this world?

God searches us and knows us and calls us. "Come and see," says Philip. God searches us, and invites us to come and see for ourselves what immersion in God's way would mean for us. "Come and see," says Jesus. God knows us, and longs for us to know God, more intimately, more deeply, with more real consequences for our lives and actions. "Come and see," I say. Jesus is all up in our business, gathering disciples still, plucking us from under our fig trees and behind our desks and sinks and lord knows what, to travel along with him a while. Let's do it. Let's go together. Come and see.

Amen.