

## Second Sunday of Epiphany

**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.**

### **Psalm 139 v1-9**

- <sup>1</sup> O Lord, you have searched me out and known me;  
you know my sitting down and my rising up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- <sup>2</sup> You mark out my journeys and my resting place  
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- <sup>3</sup> For there is not a word on my tongue,  
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.
- <sup>4</sup> You encompass me behind and before  
and lay your hand upon me.
- <sup>5</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
so high that I cannot attain it.
- <sup>6</sup> Where can I go then from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?
- <sup>7</sup> If I climb up to heaven, you are there;  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
- <sup>8</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- <sup>9</sup> Even there your hand shall lead me,  
your right hand hold me fast.

**Gospel: John 1.43–end:** The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' <sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> 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.' <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' <sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' <sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' <sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' <sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' <sup>51</sup> 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 Reverend Keir Dow**

The calling of Nathaniel has come at a very opportune moment. This Sunday is Wellbeing Sunday in this Diocese. We are invited to consider the wellbeing and mental health of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The major thing that strikes me in this passage is Nathaniel's immediate response to Philip. Having just been told of the greatest news ever in history. The Messiah is here. The Prophets said he would come and he has. He is called Jesus of Nazareth. And what is Nathaniel's response? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?". You might say that he is being sceptical, or just grumpy or even he is someone battling with issues of mental health. It could be all three. All we really know is he is disbelieving and negative but in his relationship with Jesus he changes his whole outlook.

This pandemic has affected many people in their wellbeing and their outlook. Some have become very sceptical, just as Nathaniel was. Some have become negative, just as Nathaniel was. And some are just afraid and anxious, as I imagine Nathaniel was. Now I am someone who has had his own battles with mental health. I am by no means an expert, but I have some understanding first-hand. I know that it is completely normal to have a whole range of emotions as the situations around us change. For some this can spiral to a place where the emotions are not in proportion to the situation. This is what happened to me. One of the cruellest things about it, for me was the fact that I wasn't really aware of how bad it had got until I cracked. It was a lot of work getting back to a place where my mental health is strong and robust and the key for me, alongside medication, professional help, support from friends and family, was my journey with Jesus. In this way my experience has brought me closer to Christ.

In the same way that Jesus' call of Nathaniel completely changed his life, my recovery and walk with Jesus has completely changed mine. The key aspect of this reading that shines like a beacon for me is the line "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Jesus already knew Nathaniel. Jesus Knows Us before we are born whether we are aware of this or not.

This is very much echoed in our Psalm this morning. This is a key reminder that we are all 'fearfully and wonderfully made' and we are all known by Him. As you read the Psalm you become very aware of the psalmist's understanding of his personal relationship with Jesus. I don't know about you, but I start to feel a bit unworthy. I am not like that, I have not got that level of personal relationship with Jesus. When I was broken I didn't even know where to start. For me this came in the form of the Lord's Prayer. Nothing else really made sense but I really focused my prayer in these words. I realised that I had been saying these words all this time without really understand what I was saying. I remember as a child being aware of misuse of the Lord's prayer. Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Or even Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Either way these words were what I said and this might sound a bit odd but I felt like the prayer was doing the work for me. I didn't need to think or act or feel but I was found by Jesus who knew me. Knew me so well that He was able to comfort me and bring me peace.

Most importantly He brought me to a place of self-acceptance. Yes I wish I was a little less greedy around a cheeseboard, and could shift a bit of bulk. But ultimately I am me and that is great.

For me, self-acceptance is a key part of mental health. The Psalmist in our psalm. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made. Again I would not claim to be an expert but people suffering with depression and anxiety cannot see what others might easily see. They can miss the amazing things about themselves and warp their view of themselves. We all know that God loves us and has made each of us all to be wonderfully unique. But it is easy to miss this, especially when emotions get out of control and it is hard to even think. This is when it might be worth coming back to something simple. For me it was the Lord's Prayer. For others it might be different.

During my training I was introduced to the Anglican rosary. I had always been a bit sceptical before about such things but when at theological training college you give all sorts a go, so I started praying with a set. It felt silly at first but after a while I realised that I had quietened my mind and was in a place where I felt more connected with God. It wasn't the beads that did this or, in my opinion, the words that I said, but rather finding a way to settle your mind and spirit into quietness allows a powerful yet simple thing to happen. It allows you to connect with Jesus and be reminded that He knows you, is always there, and most importantly knows that you are important. You are worthy and you are fearfully and wonderfully made.

So, as we are encouraged to look out for colleagues, congregations, brothers and sisters in Christ, and neighbours at this time of wellbeing Sunday and beyond, make sure you don't forget about that person whom Jesus knows so well and who He wants to spend time with, just as they are:

**You.**