

Stokesley Methodist Church



Sunday 17th January 2021



A Gathering Prayer from the Roots resources

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.

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

Lectionary Readings:

1 Samuel 3 v1-10, (11-20) (p274) The Lord Calls Samuel

Psalm 139 v1-6, 13-18 (p628) You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me ...

1 Corinthians 6 v12-20 (p1148) Sexual Immorality

John 1 v43-51 (p1064) Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

Come, See, Hear

This week our focus is on we help each other hear God.

Today we hear about two friends who have an unexpected encounter with Jesus and initially react in very different ways. Together, Philip and Nathanael help each other to understand who Jesus is and they begin a journey that will redefine who they are.

Nathanael is surprised that Jesus knows not only his name, but much about him too. Jesus knows each of us as individuals but sometimes, like Nathanael, we can wonder 'Why would God be interested in me?' Some of us will be, like Philip, keen to follow straight away. Some of us will be more like Nathanael – full of questions and concerns. This story shows that wherever we are, Jesus finds us and knows us. Are we looking and listening out for him – and helping others to do so?

Samuel was named to remind everyone that he was an answer to his mother's prayer for a child (1 Samuel 1.11) – his name means 'The Lord heard'. In this story from 1 Samuel 3, however, it is Samuel who hears the Lord, but he doesn't immediately understand what is going on. The powerful dynamic of two-way hearing takes a little while to be established between Samuel and the Lord, and communication is achieved only with advice from Eli, more experienced in the ways of God.

Samuel's call is complex. He lives the life of a priest, wearing priestly clothes & even sleeping close to the ark of God. As a young boy, he is already close to God, in the traditional Israelite understanding of a priest as one who stands between God and the people. Now, for the first time, God also calls this young priest to be a prophet, one who

speaks out God's word truthfully and courageously. Through Samuel, many will hear God's voice of rebuke or encouragement, and his closeness to God is essential for this ministry.

Now we come to Psalm 139. Could these words have come to Nathanael's mind as he reflected on Jesus' insight into his character? One of God's defining characteristics is a detailed, all-embracing knowledge of us, stretching back before we were born and embracing everything we are. Perhaps this connection is why Jesus' words brought an epiphany to Nathanael.

The church at Corinth had much to learn about authentic Christian living. In 1 Corinthians Paul has just reminded them of the wonderful ways God has been at work in their lives: washed, sanctified, justified. Yet despite all this, they still get it wrong. They know that they are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, and that nothing else contributes to their salvation. So, in writing to Paul, they used the phrase 'all things are lawful for me'. Paul agrees that they are saved through Christ alone, but stresses that 'all things are lawful' does not mean that 'anything goes'. There are other factors to consider. What is appropriate for me? What might endanger my freedom? What behaviour would defile the presence of God in me?

This final question leads to reflection on the particular problems raised by sins that involve the body. The presence of the Spirit within us makes us holy, and so it is wrong to corrupt our bodies. Paul concludes by emphasising that we praise God through our bodies, not just our words or thoughts. Our God, embodied in Jesus Christ, is glorified through our physicality.

Finally, John introduces his hearers to Jesus' mission a day at a time. On the previous day, Andrew and another disciple found Jesus, along with Simon Peter. Now, Jesus takes the initiative and finds Philip. There is a pattern of 'finding' as the group of disciples takes shape; some find each other, others are found by Jesus. The disciples also express their new relationship by saying: 'We have found the Messiah' (1.41).

Finding implies a profound recognition of their ability to connect deeply with Jesus' mission.

However, when Philip finds Nathanael, there is a hitch in the process. Nathanael does not accept the invitation but challenges Philip to prove that anything good, let alone the Messiah, can come from somewhere so downmarket as Nazareth! Philip's reply recalls Jesus' invitation to the two disciples the previous day – 'Come and see'. The Greek word 'see' implies far more than 'take a look'. To see is to understand. For Nathanael, though, it is not seeing but hearing that overcomes his reluctance. In conversation with Jesus, he discovers that Jesus knows far more about him than he expected. Jesus acknowledges him as 'truly an Israelite', living in God's 'shalom' where each one has their own vine and fig tree (Micah 4.4). The change is remarkable as Nathanael heaps Jesus with honorific titles: Israel's King, God's Son (Psalm 2.7). Perhaps there is a wry smile on Jesus' lips as Nathanael reacts with such enthusiasm, but then he promises far more: heaven opened, the barrier between God and humanity swept away, and angels coming and going as they did for Jacob (Genesis 28.12). To complete this encounter, Jesus tells Nathanael how he understands himself – he is the Son of Man. Does this mean that he is God's chosen one, or is he using it in the Aramaic sense of 'an ordinary person'? It's hard to tell – maybe John has both meanings in mind – but it's an important moment as Jesus names himself for the first time.

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 see & hear you too.

Amen.