

17th January 2021 6 pm Evening Prayer: Jesus Knows Nathanael

Led by Val Whiteman, Talk by Val Whiteman, Readings by Geoff Whiteman & John Wild, Intercessions by Gill Palmer

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Introduction

[Val Whiteman:]

Hi, nice to see everybody. Welcome to our service, to everybody who normally comes to 6pm in the good times and to any of those of you who might be watching from further afield, welcome to all of us. Today we're looking at our commitment to Christ in the calling of Nathanael in John's Gospel. Gill will be leading us in our intercessions and Geoff and John will be reading for us. And Charlie has a very important techie role in the background, so thank you very much for him.

Preparation

So, let us prepare ourselves to worship God in a few minutes' silence.

The light and peace of Jesus Christ be with you

All **and also with you.**

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

All **Let us rejoice and sing God’s praise for ever.**

We have come together in the name of Christ
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to hear and receive God’s holy word,
to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

1st Hymn: Blessed Assurance

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.

2. Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
Refrain

3. Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.
Refrain

Confession

Having sung God's praises, now we think about the things that we may have said or done that are displeasing to Him. So we say together our confession.

All **Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.**

Absolution

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Prayer of thanksgiving

Blessed are you, sovereign God,
our light and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You led your people to freedom
by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
May we who walk in the light of your presence
acclaim your Christ, rising victorious,
as he banishes all darkness from our hearts and minds.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

Opening prayer

The day is almost over, and the evening has come;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your Spirit come down upon us
to set us free to sing your praise
for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

2nd Hymn: You Alone Can Rescue

1. Who, O Lord, could save themselves
Their own soul could heal?
Our shame was deeper than the sea
Your grace is deeper still

Repeat verse 1

Chorus:

You alone can rescue, You alone can save
You alone can lift us from the grave
You came down to find us, led us out of death
To You alone belongs the highest praise

2. You, O Lord, have made a way
The great divide You heal
For when our hearts were far away
Your love went further still
Yes, your love goes further still

Chorus

To You alone belongs the highest praise
To You alone belongs the highest praise

1st Reading: Revelation 5:1-10 – The Scroll and the Lamb [NIV 1984]

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. **2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’ **3** But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. **4** I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. **5** Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. **7** He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. **8** And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. **9** And they sang a new song:

‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.’

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

2nd Reading: John 1:43-51 [NIV 2011]

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. **45** Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’

46 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.

'Come and see,' said Philip.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.'

48 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.'

49 Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.'

50 Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.' 51 He then added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

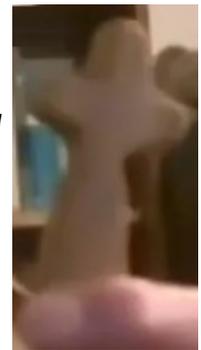
Talk

[Val Whiteman:]

We're thinking about commitment to Christ, from this reading in John. I don't remember ever having to preach on it before, so it's been an interesting experience doing the research. And it would be really helpful if you looked up the story of Jacob in Genesis after this.

In lockdown we've all found interesting things to do and for me, it's been a bit unusual. My father worked in wood all his life and he was very skilled, so I've always loved wood. Well, since lockdown, Geoff and I have been making holding crosses. I don't know if you can see them, or it, from wood which we cut from our garden. And I know, not everybody finds this thing fascinating, but I do.

So, here's the trunk, which is cut from one of the cherry trees that was ill, that we had to take out of our garden.



And Geoffrey kindly shaped it for me, so that it is a blank which looks like this. I cut it out.

And this is a really rough one that I've just started. So you can see I've just been doing the hacksawing on it. And it takes me ages to get it to the point where I linseed oiled it, and it's all smooth and beautiful and I can give it away.



The end result is very pleasing, at least to me, it gives me pleasure to shape and hold something. So, can you hold on to that sort of shaping thought for a while, while we go back to the reading.

The reading I'm looking for is the one in John which is Nathanael, the call of Nathanael. The Nathanael in this reading means 'given by God', like the more familiar 'Theodore', the Greek variant of it. And he's probably, if you are wondering why you haven't heard of him anywhere else, he's probably the Bartholomew of the other gospels, and 'Bartholomew' means, as you probably know,

'son of Tholomeus', and so that is sort of the equivalent of a surname. That's just in case you were worried that there was an extra disciple that John knew about, that the other gospel writers didn't, or *vice versa*.

So this is a rather odd story about the call of a man who came from Cana in Galilee, and had a very low opinion of anyone who came from Nazareth. You remember that Philip his friend asked how the crowd is to be fed at the feeding of the 5,000, and he's there then. And when the Greeks come to see Jesus in Jerusalem, in John 12, and Philip and Andrew bring them to see Him. Philip has a Greek name like Andrew (Nathanael doesn't).

When Philip, who calls Nathanael, speaks to Nathanael, you can sense his excitement. This Greek-speaking Andrew's brother, who comes from Bethsaida, the house of fish, Philip comes to Nathanael, obviously a friend, and he speaks to him about Jesus, and he is so excited! The structure of the sentence that he writes is, in the original, something like, "The Messiah! The one Moses and the prophets wrote about, we found Him!" And 'Nazareth' comes at the end, Jesus from Nazareth. When Nathanael jokes about Nazareth and Philip uses the same words for the inquiry that Jesus did to the disciples, "Come and see!"

And then there's the part I've always found a bit strange: when he comes to Jesus, Jesus describes Nathanael as "an Israelite, in whom there is no guile or deceit." The word he uses there interestingly is the same word that's used for fishing hook, somebody that you hook in by guile or deceit. But if you look at the end of the reading, verse 51, you may get a clue as to why Jesus says this, because Jesus is talking about Jacob. I don't know whether, when Nathanael was under the fig tree, he was contemplating Jacob's life. If he were, it would make sense. But you remember, and this is where the Genesis passage comes in, that Jacob, the trickster, tricked his brother out of his birthright, his brother Esau. And more than that, with the help of his mother, he also tricked him out of his blessing from Isaac, normally reserved for the firstborn. And Esau was of course the older twin. If you want to look at that, that's in Genesis 25 & 27.

So, when Jacob is growing up, and for a lot of Genesis, the Genesis story, he is not a very pleasant person: he tricks his way through life. As a patriarch, you know, you feel he's got a fairly long way to go before he meets anything like God's standards. You remember, he goes and finds a wife, with his kinsmen Laban, who in turn tricks him. When he's coming home again, he is frightened of Esau, with good reason. And so when he's travelling home with all his flocks that he's got with Laban and all his wives and all these children, he waits, and he talks to God and he's, perhaps for the first time in his life, a frightened man coming home, he really wrestles with God in prayer, he spends the night, Genesis talks about him wrestling with an angel in Genesis 32. So, when the angel has finished wrestling with him, slightly later, God appears during a dream that Jacob has, which we'll talk about in a minute, and his name is changed. You remember that Jacob is one of the patriarchs from whom the nation of Israel descended. He's the one who had the 12 sons from whom the 12 tribes are named. He really seems to have found walking in God's way very challenging. As I say, he's full of guile.

So when Jesus tells Nathanael that he has no guile, he's paying him a huge compliment. Unlike the patriarch and unlike many of his contemporaries and indeed Israelites through history, Nathanael is genuine. He wants to obey God's law, and walk God's way.

You can see Nathanael's astonishment, that Jesus should have known him in this way and known that he was meditating under a fig tree. And something as slight as that convinces him that Jesus is who Philip said He was: "the Messiah, the Son of God and the King of Israel." Jesus' answer to him after that takes us to the crux of this passage.

How does Nathanael believe? On the evidence before him, he accepts who Jesus is, he accepts the testimony of Philip. But Jesus says at that moment, Nathanael actually doesn't understand what it means for Jesus to be Son of God and King of Israel: they're just words. Nathanael is wonderfully moved by the fact that he seems to have found the Messiah, but there's no depth to his knowledge. Following Jesus will deepen his understanding of who Jesus is and what He's come to do.

So at the end of the passage in verse 51, Jesus goes back to the Jacob story. Still on the way home, after the wrestling, Jacob sleeps. And he sees visions of angels ascending and descending on a ladder from Heaven to Earth. It's one of the most famous pictures from the Old Testament, you probably remember Jacob's ladder. There are various interpretations of this, a lot of them from Jewish theology, but one is that the vision occurred on the same mountain on which later the Temple at Jerusalem was built. So it represented the Old Covenant, where the link between Heaven and Earth, the ladder, was the sacrificial system. In the passage in John, and this is a sort of mind-blowing bit, Jesus says that He will become the link between Heaven and Earth, the New Covenant, the ladder which enables us to come into God's presence. God promised that Jacob would be blessed, that the whole world would be blessed, because of Jacob and his descendants. He didn't live to see it. What Jesus is saying is, Nathanael has. And at the time of the call of Nathanael, Nathanael didn't understand what it meant. His idea of Jesus was relatively superficial. You'll remember that even at the time of the crucifixion, the disciples struggled to understand why Jesus had to die. And they only came to realise the impact of His death after the resurrection of Jesus, His appearances and further teaching to them.

So this is a really interesting story about a man long ago, who was called by a friend, Philip, you might call him the first evangelist, called to a Jesus that he said was the Messiah. And yet what Jesus says right at that moment is, "You actually don't know. Let me take you deeper." And for us, I think, the story of our journey with Jesus will be the same. You note in the second reading where John in Revelation shows the risen Jesus, the Lamb, in triumph, in Heaven, part of Godhead, as he says earlier in the Revelation, the beginning and the end. Where we are on our journey will depend on our experience of who Jesus is, for us. We may see Him as a miracle worker, who we call on when we're desperate, like now. We may see Him as a friend, as a brother, as uniquely able to save us. But until we recognise the transcendent glory of the Son of God, we have a lot further to go.

Remember the holding cross I showed you at the beginning, it takes me hours to shape it. In the Bible we are likened to the potter's clay, and God shapes us, just as I shape the cross and smooth it, so God shapes us. Of course, the analogy doesn't go all that far because we are involved in the process and we let God shape us if we're obedient, but we aren't the finished product on day one.



Do you remember in C.S. Lewis, when people have reached Heaven, they say, "Further up and higher in." Knowing Jesus, travelling with Him, as we do, is inexhaustible. If you are getting bored with the Christian life, I suggest you go back and talk to Jesus about it. If it all feels a bit like a chore, then talk to Him, dare to ask Him for a deeper knowledge of Himself. Jesus describes knowing Himself, knowing Jesus, to Nathanael, as a long experience, a lifetime of knowing. So wherever we are on the Christian path, let's think about "Further up and higher in", and use this time when we can't meet together as we used to do, to think what we know of Jesus, and dare, dangerously I think, to ask Him for more of Himself.

Amen.

Father God, You gave Your Son for us, to make a bridge between us and Heaven. We thank You that we can still know and follow Jesus. And we pray

now that You will give us grace to know Him better, until one day, we can see Him as He is.

Amen.

Intercessions

Now Gill will lead us in our intercessions.

[Gill Palmer:] Thank you, Val.

In peace, let us pray to Jesus our Lord, who ever lives to make intercessions for us.

I'll be using the responses, "God of love, hear our prayer."

Saviour of the world, be present in all places of suffering, violence and pain, and bring hope, even in the darkest night. Inspire us to continue Your work of reconciliation today. We pray particularly for America as they prepare to inaugurate the new President. We pray that there will be no violence or disturbance. And Lord, bring them peace. O Lord, help the new administration to heal the wounds that have opened up between different groups. Grant them wisdom and humility to create peace for all.

God of love,

hear our prayer.

Lord of the Church, empower by Your Spirit all Christian people, and the work of Your Church in every land. Give us grace to proclaim the Gospel joyfully in word and deed. Bless all of our missionary partners. And we think especially of the Stoker family as they attempt to return to the UK at this time, when travel is difficult. May their journey be safe and free from hassle.

God of love,

hear our prayer.

Shepherd and Guardian of our souls, guide and enable all who lead and serve this community and those on whom we depend for our daily needs. Grant that we may seek the peace and welfare of this place. Lord, we thank You for the care and support given by our mayor and councillors, and for the COVID-19 support group, Molly's Meals, and others working to support those in need across Kenilworth. We ask for compassion for our local businesses, and pray that they may receive all that they need to survive at this difficult time.

God of love,

hear our prayer.

Great Physician, stretch out Your hand to bring comfort, wholeness and peace to all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Fill us with compassion, that we may be channels of Your healing love.

In a moment of quiet, speak the names of those You know who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit.

Lord, we thank You for all those involved in delivering the COVID vaccine. Give them inner strength to cope with the long hours, and give them time to rest and be at peace.

God of love,

hear our prayer.

Conqueror of death, remember for good those whom we love but see no longer. Help us to live this day in the sure and certain hope of Your eternal victory.

Let us commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray to the mercy and protection of God.

God of love,

hear our prayer.

And finally, it's a pandemic prayer from the Sutton Salvation Army.

For those who are unwell and concerned for loved ones,
for those who were already anxious,
for those immune-suppressed or -compromised,
for those vulnerable because of underlying conditions,
for those in the most at risk to coronavirus categories,
for those watching their entire income stream dry up,
for those who have no choice but to go out to work,
and for those who are afraid to be at home,
for those who are more lonely than they've ever been,
for those who are bereaved and grieving,

God, be their healer, comfort and protection,
be their strength, shield and provision,
be their security, safety, and close companion.

Lord in Your mercy, accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Collect for the Fifth Sunday Before Lent

Almighty God,
by whose grace alone we are accepted and called to your service:
strengthen us by your Holy Spirit
and make us worthy of our calling;
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

So let's say the Lord's Prayer together.

**All 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

[Gill:] I now I think I'm going to be joined by Val for a blessing.

[Gill:] The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.
[Val:] The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.

[Gill:] So we say the grace.

[Val:] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
[Gill:] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.
[Val:] Amen.

And, before we end we have a dismissal sentence:

Freely you have received, freely give.

It's been lovely having everybody with us. We've enjoyed sharing God's Word with you. And we end now with the next hymn, 'At The Name Of Jesus'. If anything has spoken to you, please get in touch with our administrator Denise, and she'll put you in touch with somebody who will pray for you.

So, God bless and good night.

3rd Hymn: At The Name Of Jesus

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. At the name of Jesus
Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess Him
King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
We should call Him Lord,
Who from the beginning
Was the mighty Word.</p> <p>2. Humbled for a season
To receive a name
From the lips of sinners
Unto whom He came,
Faithfully He bore it
Spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious,
When from death He passed.</p> | <p>3. Name Him, brothers, name Him,
With love strong as death,
But with awe and wonder
And with bated breath:
He is God the Saviour,
He is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshipped,
Trusted, and adored.</p> <p>4. In your hearts enthrone Him;
There let Him subdue
All that is not holy,
All that is not true.
Crown Him as your Captain
In temptation's hour,
Let His will enfold you
In its light and power.</p> |
|--|---|
5. Brothers, this Lord Jesus
Shall return again,
With His Father's glory,
With His angel-train;
For all wreaths of empire
Meet upon His brow,
And our hearts confess Him
King of glory now.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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