

Sermon 18 January 2015
1 Corinthians 6:12-20 John 1:43-51 'Vision Transforms'

Prayer: You, who see us more completely than we know, give us the capacity to see both people and all of creation as you so. Enable us to trust the power of your transforming vision for our world, so we live honestly and creatively in the freedom of being your disciples. Amen.

"Perhaps the only people who view the world realistically are the cynics and the saints...and the only difference between the cynics and the saints is the presence, power and possibility of hope",^{*1} says J Wallis. And **hope** is to trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future. So extending this for us today might be to say saints have vision and cynics don't!

And what we have in our text is that **Jesus transforms** people from cynic to saint – and I have to confess I am his work *in progress*! It is for most of us I like to think, *easier* to be cynics than to have hope, a future, vision of a better way.... And yet that call to see, live, be better in all that we are and do and think and pray and... is what Jesus said that day to Nathanael and Paul was covering in his teaching about our bodies being Temples of the Holy Spirit, our being with all that we are, what the NT calls 'saints'!

Even in the English translation we see how Nathanael is being a cynic. He is rude about Nazareth and he challenges Jesus's opening sentences to him. Scholars^{*2} say being rude about Nazareth might have been that he was a 'local' possibly from Cana (John's 1st miracle from Jesus at the wedding feast) so Nathanael was just expressing local town rivalry – **but then** Nazareth is such a small place it is not even mentioned in the Old Testament! *Whatever it was*, Nathanael was completely transformed by Jesus vision of where (*who???*) he was when Philip called him to come and see Jesus. **Vision transforms!**

Our vision of what is happening in this exchange *might be* limited because of our lack of understanding of the Israelite / Biblical references that are hidden from us. There is a whole lot of background that Jesus, his disciples up to and including John's time, that meant this verbal exchange has a lot deeper meaning than we 'hear'.

One explanation^{*3} is that it is an argument between Galilean Jews (represented by Jesus) and Judean Jews (represented by the Temple). A few examples why: John has Jesus starting his ministry in Galilee; Philip has basically just announced the 'finding of the Messiah – **not** from Jerusalem and the Temple, but from Galilee (Bethsaida which at the time of writing was in Galilee); Philip places Jesus in Nazareth as his point of origin – a Galilean!

Then we have the 2 references to Nathanael coming from Genesis 28 with story of the transformation of the Jacob / Israel. The point when Jacob (the schemer / rat-bag) is transformed into Israel the patriarch through whom God works to make the promises to Abraham come true. The first is with Nathanael being 'a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false', or "Behold, an Israel in whom there is no Jacob"^{*4} (*now that's an 'ouch' statement if ever we were to hear one!*). Cv

The second is with the promise that Nathanael will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'. Remember Jacob's ladder, a key part of **His** transformation? Nathanael has his own 'ladder', so he is here presented as the "true Israelite," **who goes on to name** Jesus as "son of God" and "King of Israel." The fourth gospel is saying: A "true Israelite"--a true son of Jacob--is one who comes to Jesus^{*5} cV

And not only is a true Israelite one who comes to Jesus – but is one who comes to follow – **to imitate** Jesus and who as a follower **will see greater** things than what Jesus himself did. This is a saying that is completely consistent with other teachings from Jesus throughout his ministry. The vision Jesus gave was

^{*1} *God's Politics*, Jim Wallis (p. 347) ^{*2} Fr. Ray Brown ^{*3} J Petty ^{*4} Rev Russell Davies URC Australia ^{*5} Church of Scotland: Rev Scott S McKenna, Minister of Edinburgh: Mayfield Salisbury, ^{*6} SeasonsMediacom ^{*7} SacradiseJVanDeLaar

for more than the moment of time to welcome Nathanael, it was for all who hear the call, grasp Jesus vision to both follow and imitate him.

We don't hear any more of Nathanael – some think he might be Bartholomew because in Matthew, Mark and Luke it is Bartholomew who is linked to Philip but... But it is stories like this that tell us Jesus had a lot more followers than his 12 disciples! What we do know is that Nathanael's transformation began when he heard Jesus welcome and challenged Jesus in reply. It seems to me that it is vital for Nathanael for Jesus to be 100% honest – so far we have been given a picture of a cynical, questioning man, who is deep into his faith as he knows it. Jesus reply completes the picture and Nathanael believes! cV

What Jesus had to work with was Nathanael's "48 "How do you know me?" or Jesus *could* have heard: ^{*3} "Where did you know me?" or more literally: "From where are you knowing me?" The Greek word is *ginosko*, a "knowing" of deep intimacy and thoroughness. Somehow in the few words of Jesus reply Nathanael knew Jesus saw him as he really was – his true and complete self.

Jesus saw all those 'bits of our 'self' we keep hidden, we show only to a few trusted others, our vulnerable parts... Jesus saw him *as* – for **who** he really was. For Nathanael this had only one response – there is only "One" who could possibly 'know' him like this – only God, *therefore* Jesus was of God. Jesus was a Rabbi (teacher) Son of God and King of Israel. Cv

There is only 'One' who knows us inside and out – Jesus / God, and knowing us that much / that deeply still that 'One' **gives us a vision** of himself to follow and imitate, calling us to be his people, his body, his church today. And this is why what we do – and how we live is so important – we are the vision of Jesus people see when they look at us they see Jesus – *don't they?* We are him – in the world *right?* Cv

Remember our other Bible reading today? ^{*5} St Paul asked the Corinthians, 'Do you not know that **your bodies are members of Christ?**' He said, 'Anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.' Again, he asked, 'Do you not know that your body is a temple [or sanctuary] of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?' CV

In reading the letters of the apostle, it is important to set his words in the context of his own religious – spiritual – experience. Personal union with Christ is the constant and dominating factor: union and communion with Christ is what Paul means by salvation. For example in Galatians, he wrote, 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.' And remember on the Road to Damascus, he 'saw' the Risen Christ. cV

For Paul, Christ was a living, **inner reality**. 'We are being transformed... from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.' Our bodies are a temple, a sanctuary, of the Holy Spirit: God is alive within us. In other words, **how we live matters**. Our devotion to the world, our worship of its material values, our lust for power, possessions and money must give way to a deeper, more profound way of living.

It is Paul now who is casting a vision for Jesus followers, ^{*6} rather than seeing the freedom found in Christ as liberty to do whatever we please, Paul argues our freedom exists for the sake of building up the whole body. ^{*4}Dr Gunion Rutherford translates this sentence as "In all things I may do as I please, but I will not be so false to myself as to let things do as they please with me." We have the choice of what we do – how we live, what we say and who we mix with – what we do with our mind and body.

^{*7} It becomes our task as followers to study each day the example of Christ and seek to imitate in our own actions and attitudes what we see in him, trusting in the power of God's Spirit to enable us to do this. What a transformations we would be enabling through the living out our vision of **being** the body of Christ. Amen

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