

# January 2020

## West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Nanda Groenewald

Reading: John 1:43-51

Hymn: CH4 251 Here I am Lord

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### PRAYER

Creator God, how awesome you are!

Our lives were known to you before we came into being.

Marvellous Lord,

Everything we do, think and say – you know about.

Such infinite wonder!

Eternal, loving Lord,

Ever helping us to see and be more like you.

How awesome you are, glorious Lord.

Everywhere we go your hand is with us,

Always guiding and revealing your blessings –

as we praise, listen and act.

Almighty God, you speak to us in so many ways.

Please forgive us for the times we choose not to listen to your voice...

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.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray:  
Our Father, Who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be Thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom come.  
Thy Will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.  
Forever,  
Amen.

## **READING**

### **John 1:43-51**

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.'

<sup>44</sup> Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. <sup>45</sup> 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.'

<sup>46</sup> ‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked.

‘Come and see,’ said Philip.

<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.’

<sup>48</sup> ‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked.

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

<sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.’

<sup>50</sup> Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.’ <sup>51</sup> 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.’

## **MESSAGE**

Today we heard the story of two friends who had an unexpected encounter with Jesus. It was day 2 in John’s recollection of how Jesus called his disciples. The previous day Andrew and Peter started following Jesus.

These 2 friends, Philip and Nathanael, had two completely different reactions to the news that Jesus was the Messiah the Old Testament promised.

Philip was overjoyed! He couldn’t wait to go share this amazing news with his friend. I can just see him running to Nathanael straight away, shouting the good news when he saw him in the distance: “Hey pal! Guess what?!” And then taking a few seconds to catch his breath, before he said, with a beaming smile on his face: “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!”

Nathanael’s reaction must have taken the wind right out of Philip’s sails, because instead of jumping with joy at this news, he said: “Nazareth! Can anything good come from *there*?”

*Can you see how dangerous it is to stereotype? The Saviour of the world wasn’t born in a well-to-do, famous, important city, like you would expect. No, he was born in a wee place lots of people looked down on. Nathanael was soon to learn that Jesus wasn’t like anybody else...*

But Philip wasn’t going to allow his cynical friend to dampen his joy. He decided not to go into all kinds of arguments about the possibility of the Messiah being born in a place like Nazareth... He simply said: “Come and see.”

*Here is another wee lesson for us: We are masters at forming arguments about all kinds of topics. We love voicing our opinions. Just look at what is happening at the moment – a politician says something on the news, and minutes later millions of people tweet what they think about the statement, or even the person making the statement. We want to feel that we are ‘heard’. But this story wants to teach us that sometimes it is more important to LISTEN...*

In Greek, the language the New Testament was originally written in, the word “see” implies more than to simply “take a look”. For them, to “see” meant to “understand”.

And on meeting Jesus, Nathanael would understand straight away.  
Because Jesus didn't only know *who* he was, he also knew *what kind of person* he was.

Nathanael was astonished. It might have taken him a while, but now he was overjoyed too. In HEARING what Jesus said, in LISTENING to him, his whole attitude changed.

And then Jesus surprised him even more: He said: "You think this is amazing my friend? Stick around, and you will see even greater things than that..."

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I love this story. There is so much that we can take away from what happened to Philip and Nathanael.

Because we are all different too.

For some people it comes naturally to follow Jesus straight away. No questions asked, people like this just KNOW it's the right thing to do, and then they do it.

But for others it's not that straight forward. They are critical, they have questions, and they are only able to follow Jesus once they understand things a little better.

We are all different, and there is nothing wrong with that. God MADE us different after all.

The important thing is that we have to be open minded enough to “go and see”.

Because if we do, Jesus *will* surprise us.

Philip and Nathanael are proof of that. For them this was the start of a journey with Jesus, a journey which would redefine who they were.

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And it all started when they *listened* to Jesus. When they *heard* his voice.

Do you know what the logo of the music and film store HMV stands for?

It might be because I didn't grow up in the UK, but I had no idea! For those of you, who, like me, don't know, let me tell you the story:

The logo is a dog sitting in front of a wax-cylinder phonograph, listening to the sound coming from the horn. Let me show you.



It is based on a painting by Liverpool artist, Francis Barraud, entitled ‘His Master’s Voice’. Which, of course, is where the company name HMV comes from.

Here is a picture of the original painting:



The painting is based on real events. Francis' brother Mark died, but left recordings of his voice on a wax cylinder. Whenever Francis played them, Mark's dog – Nipper – would run over to the machine and listen intently. He truly recognised his master's voice.

What a nice wee story!

If you have a pet, you may be familiar with this and you might have your own stories to tell.

Of course, pets don't always *understand* what is being said. But they listen to their owner's voice, because they know their owner loves them and takes care of them.

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If we put this in the context of today's Gospel reading, I would like to ask you a question: Do we recognise God's voice?

We might not always understand what he is saying or what it means, but we know that he loves us and takes care of us – and what better reason do we need to then listen to him and obey him?

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Just like Jesus knew Nathanael, even before Nathanael met Jesus, God knows every single one of us too. He knows what we find easy, and what we find hard. He knows sometimes we can follow him unconditionally, but sometimes we have lots of questions. But none of this changes his love for us.

God still talks to us today, in so many different ways. He still wants us to follow him. So let's do that.

Even though we are finding ourselves in an extremely complicated situation at the moment.

Like I've said before, we live in a time where people love to voice their opinions. So let's choose today to not only *talk* about the love God has for his people, but to rather *show* the world that God is with us all the time, even during this worldwide pandemic.

Wherever you are finding yourself on your journey through life today – God will find you. Just like he found Nathanael.

Let's live so close to him, that we never find it difficult to recognise his voice.



And let's hold on to the promise Jesus made to Nathanael, and to all of us: "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. *You shall see greater things than that.*"

Amen

## **HYMN**

### **CH4 251**

I, the Lord of sea and sky  
I have heard my people cry  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
My hand will save

I, who made the stars of night  
I will make their darkness bright  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me  
I will hold your people in my heart

I, the Lord of snow and rain  
I have borne my people's pain  
I have wept for love of them  
They turn away

I will break their hearts of stone  
Give them hearts for love alone  
Who will speak my word to them  
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me  
I will hold your people in my heart

I, the Lord of wind and flame  
I will tend the poor and lame  
I will set a feast for them  
My hand will save

Finest bread I will provide  
'Til their hearts be satisfied  
I will give my life to them  
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me  
I will hold your people in my heart