

Sunday 14th January 2018
2nd Sunday of Epiphany (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: I Samuel 3.1-10
NT: Revelation 5.1-10
G: John 1.43-end

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I don't know if it is your experience but sometimes being a Christian working in a secular environment can feel like being a member of a secret society. And occasionally, and maybe quite unexpectedly you discover that a colleague or work associate is also a committed Christian. It's not that you're ashamed of your faith but we live in a society where we delicately step round other people's beliefs, be they political or religious, with a quiet circumvention. When acts of terrorism perpetrated in the so called Irish Troubles or at the instigation of Isis, confuse religious beliefs with political idealisation, we can become rather reticent in expressing our beliefs.

The current Prevent programme asks people to be aware if someone known to them appears to be radical in their faith which in turn might lead to political acts of violence. Likewise, the wearing of obvious religious symbols, crucifixes or hijabs, can cause discomfort and even anger in others.

We tend to tread carefully where faith is concerned.

So what should we do about it? When Fr Crispin turns up at a meeting, (I was going to say they know what they are getting, though I doubt very much that they do, certainly if they don't know him!) But they are expecting the Rector of Liverpool and he is there in some aspect of connection with the Church. For those of us in secular work, our faith may not be as immediately obvious, but it is there. When I worked in the mental health services, I occasionally sent staff for support and counselling to the service provided by the local NHS Trust.

I had met the manager of that service on a number of occasions and always thought how perfect she was for the work she was involved in. She exuded a sense of peace and tranquillity, was always a good listener and never appeared rattled or shocked by what she heard. It was only some years later, that she told me that she was a Quaker.

And then it all made perfect sense. She displayed her committed religious beliefs, not ostensibly but through who she was, through a Christlike approach to listening and healing. Her faith was visible in her work not through any religious garment or jewellery but through the person that she was.

We have reached the point in the gospel story where Jesus is calling his disciples at the beginning of his public ministry. His call is a simple one, 'Follow me'. Jesus does not check CVs, there is no mention of existing spiritual commitment. Jesus has not gone to the synagogue to make his choices. All we know is that he has gone to Galilee to find the men he was looking for. Jesus does not call Nathanael directly but Philip goes to tell him that *'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.'*

But Nathanael has his own prejudices and cannot believe that any Messiah could originate from Nazareth.

But Philip wisely does not try to overturn his prejudice with words, rather he suggests that he come and see for himself. The gospel does not record in detail exactly what Nathanael saw in Jesus but it does tell us that from that first encounter, Nathanael believed himself to be fully known by Jesus and went on to declare that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel. An amazing turn of events. Nathanael has gone from sceptic to firm believer in one meeting.

In realising that he is completely known, Nathanael acknowledges his creator. This Jesus is no ordinary man from Nazareth but the Son of God. This is true for each one of us. I don't know what you see in Jesus and I certainly cannot tell you what you should be seeing. Each one of us will see something different, just as each one of us is different. Created in the image and likeness of God but created to be unique. Like Philip, I cannot tell you what you should think, but like Philip, I have been called to bring you to Jesus so that you can have your own encounter, develop your own relationship, make your own commitment. Nathanael recognised that something had deeply touched Philip and this recognition was enough for him to overcome his scepticism and go and see this Jesus for himself.

This brings me back to our life outside this Christian community.

It may be no bad thing that, for whatever reason, we do not, cannot, openly flaunt our Christian beliefs.

In doing so we may only play into people's misplaced prejudices. All Christians are goody goody two shoes.

All Christians are intolerant of people who not comply with the 2.4 children, heterosexual, married family.

All Christians are socks and sandals wearers.

Our calling is to be the person that we were created to be. Our calling is

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

Our calling is to be faithful to the teaching of Jesus and to the gospel in all that we do.

In this way, others will come to recognise in us something that is beyond our human nature, they will come to recognise the love of God at work in our society, they will see for themselves the person of Jesus alive and active, yesterday, today and tomorrow. And, please God, they will be, like Nathanael, intrigued enough to come and find out more for themselves.

I said at the beginning, that from time to time, you unexpectedly encounter another committed Christian in your workplace. It's not with a funny handshake, or a nod or a wink. It's with that shared realisation of the power of the love of Jesus at work in our lives, a love which shapes everything we do, that is beyond all words but which touches the very heart of our being. And then in the middle of a meeting that can be boring, difficult or just plain pointless, you catch a glimpse of our loving Saviour and you know for certain that all is well. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose