Sermon: Epiphany 2B St John 1: 43–end & 1 Samuel 3: 1–10

As we trundle our way through this season of Epiphany – a season of things becoming known or made present – our Gospel reading today presents us with the revelation, made by Nathanael, that Jesus is the King of Israel. A startling, enthusiastic, joyful announcement made in all sincerity, in almost blind faith. This declaration mirrors the revelation we heard last week when, at his Baptism, a voice from heaven professed that Jesus was my/God’s son and the promised gift of the Spirit was seen to descend upon him in affirmation. But it also reinforces the gifts given by the Magi on the Feast of the Epiphany – gifts we know to be fit for a King! In these revelations Jesus is shown to be both King and Son of God. Someone in whom great works will be done, on whom angels will attend and minister – certainly greater works than simply noticing someone sitting under a tree!

This idea of being made known is supported by our first reading from the Book of Samuel. In the opening sentences we are told “The word of the Lord was rare in those days…” Some 2600 years later, many (I dare suggest) re-echo these sentiments. Yet into these days of yesteryear, of illusive visions and sparse divine encounters, we hear God calling to Samuel. At first Samuel assumed the voice to be that of his earthly master Eli and so went to see how he could be of service. Eli, not yet aware of the boy’s Divine encounter, sends him away until, on the third occasion, he twigs that the voice Samuel is hearing is the Lord’s. Eli then instructs Samuel on what to do and say – so that God’s presence may be made known to him. Samuel has an Epiphany – a moment of transformation where the veil between heaven and earth becomes so thin that God’s presence is tangible, certainly audible, and definitely personal.

Then, as now, God is known about but not known. Samuel – working in the Temple – knew about God and his mighty acts: how he rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt; how he performed miracles through Moses and how, in response to the covenant he made with Israel, gave the Law as framework to live; but he didn’t know God for himself. He didn’t recognise his voice. He didn’t know how to listen or speak with God. There was no relationship other than obedience to the ordinances set out in stone on Mount Sinai. But that changed. Through the perceptive understanding of someone else God’s call on Samuel became real and with it a deep and lasting relationship with the Lord that was nurtured and subsequently flourished. God had not been known, but he became so and Samuel became one of the greatest and most influential prophets in the story of salvation.

Some 600 years after the time of Samuel, the people of Israel still struggled with knowing God. There was an impersonal, legalistic, and prescriptive understanding of the Divine. Some were content with this, others less so – actively looking for revelations and signs of the longed for Messiah, King, and Son of God spoken of by myriads of prophets. Andrew was one such person, open and receptive to the idea Jesus could be the much awaited anointed one. He called to his friends and invited them to see what he had found. To begin with his invitation was met with scorn and contempt: “can anything good come out of Nazareth!” – a similar insult we might make of places like Stevenage or Luton! And yet, sure enough, they came to see. Their interest was piqued and there, in the face of Jesus they too found what they were looking for and enter into a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

2000 years later, society in general has wandered away from God again, knowing of him but not actually knowing him. Devoid of the physical man Jesus in our midst his divine revelation (through the pages of Scripture and the Sacraments) is treated as fake news, a fable, a hoax. The Church has not helped her cause either by failing to engage in telling the story of salvation and by constant internal disputes! And yet, when she does actually share the Gospel of Christ, when individuals like Nathanael – full of scorn and self-importance – are introduced to Jesus their eyes open, their hearts stir, and they too profess Jesus as King, Son of the Living God.

Our readings today – the season we are in – remind us of the importance of making God, in Christ, known on a personal level and of our responsibility as fellow believers to be active in sharing with others the great joys and benefits of knowing God and being known and loved by him; of being in a living relationship with him. Our task, like Andrew’s, is to share in God’s invitation to be eternally and unconditionally loved by him; to be forgiven for the sins we have made when we truly repent; and to be offered the gift of life in all its fullness. What could be a greater and deeper joy and blessing to friends and family during this pandemic than the joys God offers in Jesus Christ? For sure, we all long to see friends and family; to touch and be touched; and for things to return to ‘normal’ but these joys will fade when we once again take them for granted. The lasting joys of divine encounter, forgiveness, and salvation will never fade. And to get us there… we need God’s transformation and renewal. May our prayer be:

Almighty God,

in Christ you make all things new:

transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives

make known your heavenly glory;

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.**