

## What are friends for ?

18 1 15

Almighty God,  
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles  
the wonder of your saving presence:  
renew your people with your heavenly grace,  
and in all our weakness  
sustain us by your mighty power.

Our text this morning may be found in today's gospel, John chapter 1 verse 46:

**'Come and see.'**

Today's gospel is John's account of the fourth and fifth disciples joining Jesus. Earlier in the opening chapter of John's gospel, two of John the Baptist's disciples attach themselves to Jesus who invites them in. The one who is actually named, Andrew, promptly goes off and brings his brother, Simon Peter, to meet Jesus and Peter becomes the third disciple. The second disciple, unnamed, is most likely John himself. Then, Jesus returns to Galilee where he calls Philip to follow him and Philip, without hesitation, does so. Having met Jesus for himself and being convinced of who and what he is, Philip in turn goes off to find his friend, Nathaniel, and what follows is the subject of our gospel passage today.

If you have been following my 'Bartholomew Gospel' in our magazine, then 20 months on you will know that I am interested in the friendship between Philip and

Nathaniel Bartholomew. Philip is the son of a fisherman from Bethsaida on the shores of Lake Galilee. Nathaniel is from Cana, some 30 kilometres inland and according to tradition he may have been the son of an aristocratic, Jewish family. How the two met and became friends I wonder. The four gospels don't include such biographical snippets though mine offers a possible solution. But one thing is clear – Philip and Nathaniel are friends. In the synoptic gospels, they are paired as Philip and Bartholomew in the list of the disciples. Here, in John, it is the act of a friend that motivates Philip to share the good news about Jesus with Nathaniel.

Philip finds his friend sitting under a fig tree. Did Philip already know where his friend would be? Is the fig tree on Philip's family's land? What was Nathaniel doing there: reading, praying, sleeping? Philip comes straight out with what is to him the most exciting news ever: **'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.'** Now I don't know about you but to me what Philip is saying is a bit of a mouthful. If I had met the Messiah and wanted to tell my mate the exciting news, would I have been so long-winded, so clinically, theologically correct? No way: I'd have simply said something like 'The Messiah is in Bethsaida now!' But I love Nathaniel's reply. Instead of sharing Philip's obvious enthusiasm, he picks up on where Jesus is said to come from – Nazareth – and he pours cold water on what Philip is bubbling on about by voicing his prejudice: **'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'** At which point, without losing his temper or getting cross with his friend, Philip patiently says to Nathaniel, **'Come and see.'**

And it is what he sees and hears and feels that convinces Nathaniel and makes him say, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God ! You are the King of Israel.' So what convinces Nathaniel that Jesus is the Messiah ? There are two things: what we have written and what is implied, suggested, by the text. What is written is Jesus' greeting: 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.' Jesus is simply saying that in Nathaniel, he recognises an honest, straight-forward, good-living, God-loving Jew. Nathaniel accepts Jesus' description of him and true-to-form, to his character-type, Nathaniel challenges Jesus as he's just challenged his friend, Philip, this time by simply asking 'Where did you come to know me ?' Fair enough - good question. Jesus is a stranger to him so how does he know so well who and what Nathaniel is ? And Jesus replies with a word of knowledge: 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' What we have here is Jesus sharing his vision of Nathaniel before they ever met. Jesus was aware of Nathaniel in the spirit before he ever met him in the flesh. But I'm guessing that Nathaniel was well impressed by what he saw and felt being in the presence of Jesus as much as by what was said to him. If you've ever been in the presence of someone with charisma, someone blessed with real holiness, then you may appreciate why Nathaniel responds so positively to Jesus.

This morning, we have once again heard and looked at the way our patron saint, Bartholomew, came to be a disciple of Jesus. It is no accident that we have two icons in church, one of Bartholomew and one of Philip; two stained glass windows of the two friends. Without Philip's act of friendship, of sharing what was most important, most special to him with someone he loved, would Nathaniel have ever come to be a disciple of Jesus and our church dedicated to his memory ?

And, of course, my question to you this morning must be simply be this: 'Who do you love enough to share what's important to you ?'

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 31 : What are friends for ?

