

WEEKLY SERMON

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A Vision of the Future

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.'⁵¹ And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' (John 1, 43-51)

Imagine this. One morning the doorbell goes and you answer your front door to find a strange looking man staring at you. He says, 'I want you to leave behind your house, your family, your job, your friends and all your possessions to come and follow me.'

How would you react to an invitation like that? Most probably you'd slam the door in his face. Or even if you listened you'd have endless questions. Why should I follow you? Where to? What's in it for me?

Yet in this reading from the very end of the extraordinary first chapter of St John's Gospel, this is exactly what happens. Jesus says, 'Follow me' to Philip. And Philip does exactly that. What's more he becomes a recruiting officer for other disciples who also become followers of Jesus. How were these first disciples able to make such a sacrifice with so little thought or reflection?

The answer comes in the extraordinary promise that Jesus makes to Nathaniel at the end of the passage. '*You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*' Jesus offers his disciples a vision of the future. And on the strength of that promise they can let go of everything.

We are living through very dark times in our nation at the moment. Coronavirus infection rates are increasing at terrifying speed, hospitals are barely coping with demand, we're shut up in our homes, we have lost so many of the freedoms that make life worth living, many of churches have felt the need to close and the news is all doom and gloom. People are desperately looking for a vision of a brighter future.

And that is exactly what the Gospel offers. A vision of the future is what we are given in relationship with Jesus Christ. In him we too can see heaven thrown open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. In fact that's just what we do see every time we gather for worship.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

If you are unsure of your future, that uncertainty crawls its way back to fill your present with anxiety and stress.

But if you know the future, and if you believe with all your heart that your future is a good and glorious one, then even in hard times you can live in hope. We know that Jesus has won the victory. We know that in him the darkness will be dispelled. We know that love will triumph. And in that hope, even in the darkest times, we can be a people of joy.

Bishop Philip North