

## Readings

1 Samuel 3v1-10

1 Corinthians 6v12-20

John 1v43-51

May the words that I speak and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## CONNECTIONS

We are all here this morning -- connected by Zoom and our computers which are hopefully behaving themselves.

The word that jumped out at me from both the Old Testament and the gospel reading this morning was CONNECTIONS.

We meet all sorts of people, from many different places, during the course of our lives and with some we have an instant point of CONNECTION.

I'm sure you can think of some examples for yourself. One rather strange example of this was when I had joined Pete on one of his business trips [quite a rare occurrence when the children were little].

We were in Java standing on the rim of a live volcano. We had arrived in a mini-bus with a group of people we didn't know. As we stood watching little puddles of lava giving off very smelly steam a couple engaged us in conversation -- and it turned out that the husband had worked for the same company as Pete at the same time in Surrey. Surrey to Java!

In our reading from the first Chapter of John our author is explaining the CONNECTION between the central characters. But let's go back briefly to the beginning of this chapter. Verses 1-13 [generally referred to as the Prologue] stand alone. It is thought that they were already written before this gospel was composed and that our author adapted them to introduce what he and his community believed about the incarnation. They believed that Jesus "the word" was with God from the beginning of time and was present at the creation of our world.

He wants us to make this CONNECTION that Christ was a DIVINE part of the God-head, yet revealed himself to us in human form. "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God"

And then, as the narrative begins in v 14, "the word became flesh and lived among us".

The next CONNECTION is between Jesus and his earthly relatives. His cousin John the Baptist had been preaching to people in the desert, on the shore of the Dead Sea, telling them that someone was about to be sent to them from God. He would change their lives; and they should repent. They should prepare themselves to be ready to receive the Messiah.

John then sees Jesus coming towards him and says "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world"

He is the first to recognise that Jesus is the promised Messiah he had been preaching about, and that his vocation paled into insignificance compared to that of his cousin.

The following day John is standing with two of his disciples and repeats to them what he had said earlier -- “Look, here is the lamb of God”.

These two disciples heard what John said and left him to follow Jesus.

I wonder how John felt at that point. We don't know how long they had been with him – possibly for years.

And look who one of them was -- Andrew the brother of Simon Peter.

This is a close family CONNECTION. Andrew immediately goes and witnesses to his brother -- “We have found the Messiah”.

It is often harder to witness to those close to us. I can imagine that Peter, from what we know of his character, might laugh at what his brother was trying to tell him. And what about the un-named disciple? Some scholars think he is the Beloved Disciple, the author of the gospel.

All of this section of chapter 1 is about not just CONNECTIONS but how each of these first disciples wanted to share their joy and enthusiasm of meeting Jesus with their friends and family.

I remember my previous rector in Cheam one Sunday morning sharing his passion for American Football with the congregation.

I have no interest in any kind of football and cannot understand why it features on the main evening news. I recognise, however, that following a particular football team is as important for some people as having a faith or even more so. The rector in Cheam said that if the young dads in

the congregation were so passionate and talkative about their sport then how about feeling the same way about their faith and being prepared to talk to others about it.

And now we move back to this morning's reading and the story continues.

Jesus finds Philip whose name suggests that he has a Greek background, so Jesus is already offering his message to non-Jews.

We are told that Philip came from the same town as Andrew and Peter; if that was the case then perhaps the other two had already been speaking to their neighbours about Jesus. This would make Philip's reaction to Jesus' call to follow him more explicable.

So here is another CONNECTION. Do we witness to our neighbours about our faith -- maybe not in words but by how we live our lives.

Philip then goes and finds his friend Nathaniel to share HIS enthusiasm that the Messiah has arrived.

Unfortunately when Nathaniel hears that Jesus comes from Nazareth, he immediately rejects the proposition that Jesus can be God's chosen one.

I wonder how many times we reject people -- people we know very little about -- just because of where they come from, or what their accent might say about their background. But Philip doesn't give up -- he says come and see for yourself.

I find it impressive when others are prepared to accompany us on our journey and don't just say "he's in the market square, take the first turning on the left and you'll find him."

I remember going to our local hospice one cold wet November night because I had received a phone call to say a friend of mine was very near death. When I arrived the nurse on the reception desk sat me down and told me my friend had just died and her family were still with her. She didn't point me down a corridor but said just wait a moment and I will take you to her. She went with me. In the same way Philip goes with Nathaniel to meet Jesus.

It's not enough just to tell people the times of church services or to give them a map. We have to go along with them; sit with them; share with them, although I recognise that this is not possible at the moment.

Nathaniel is impressed that Jesus seems to know all about him before they meet.

The Psalm which is set for this morning is number 139. It describes how God knows us before we are even born, we don't enter the world as sinful beings but are loved by God before we can even realise it. It says that even before we could speak God knew us completely. And again "O lord you have searched me and know me.....and are acquainted with all my ways...you lay your hand upon me....such knowledge is too wonderful for me.

To feel God reaching out to touch us as a sign of his love is a wonderful picture.

But back to Nathaniel. He seems to believe in Jesus because Jesus said he could see him relaxing under a fig tree before he agreed to accompany Philip to go and meet him in person.

As Nathaniel approaches, Jesus says “Here is a man in whom there is no guile”. What a great thing for someone to have said about them.

The story ends with Jesus speaking in very eschatological language but basically suggesting that through his ministry and death the way to God will be opened and he will be revealed in his true glory.

This picture that Jesus paints is of the heavens being opened and angels ascending and descending.

It is reminiscent of the story of Jacob in the Old Testament where, after stealing his brother’s birthright, he runs away into the desert and, exhausted, lies down and tries to sleep. Jacob is scared for his life, wondering what his brother might do to him, and also feeling guilty about what he has done.

He has a dream in which he sees a ladder stretching from earth up into the heavens, with angels climbing up and down. He believes this is a message from God, who he fears has abandoned him because of his actions.

Here is Jesus suggesting the same picture for all of us. We have access to the father who will forgive our past -- whatever that may include -- if we truly repent.

We are moving to a time in the liturgical calendar when we are given the space to come before God, to say sorry and to rejoice that the heavens are open and we are forgiven by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

The CONNECTION here is the ladder (symbolically Jesus) who has made it possible for us to be in the presence of God both now and in eternity.

And, if we believe this, we might feel that we are a bit like Samuel who was called by God to deliver a very difficult message to his people. God is calling us just as he called Samuel and the first disciples. Perhaps our answer should be the same --“Lord here I am , send me”.

I want to finish by repeating the words from a well-known hymn which we are about to sing later in our service:-  
I the Lord of snow and rain  
I have heard my people's pain....  
I 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