

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

Dear Friends

Two scripture readings occurred together in Morning Prayer earlier this week that gave me considerable pause for thought.

The first (from Genesis 28) is the story of Jacob's dream in which he saw a ladder stretching to the heavens. In the dream God assures Jacob of his presence and protection. Upon waking Jacob declares: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!".

The second (John 1) is the conversation between Philip and Nathaniel. On hearing of Jesus' approach, Nathaniel declares: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" To which Philip offers the invitation: "Come and see".

There are many parts of our communities up and down the country to which many would declare: "Can anything good come out of there?" Nathaniel's comment resonates strongly today in our polarised culture where conclusions about places and people are reached long before there is any direct engagement – and frequently, of course, there is never any direct engagement at all.

The asylum seekers currently living in the Bromsgrove Hotel and Spa have been subjected to terrible abuse and hatred by people who have echoed Nathaniel's disdain. Such hatred can only be maintained by refusing to recognise that asylum seekers are human beings like ourselves. Once humanity is acknowledged it becomes much more difficult to use abusive language that marginalises and oppresses people.

Philip understood this, hence his invitation to Nathaniel to 'come and see'. Here is an invitation to enter into relationship with 'the other' and decide for yourself, and not on the basis of fear, ignorance and prejudice.

But where does Jacob fit into this?

On waking Jacob declares "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!". Here is an epiphany moment for Jacob as he realises that the presence of God is not related to 'a place' but to the 'whole place'. God is not to be found in the Ark of the Covenant or in a temple (or in a church) but in all of these places and in the whole of creation too...

An enormous amount of political energy is consumed in defining and categorising places and people. We see this in the opposing language used about migrants and asylum seekers. These terms legally mean quite different things but this is ignored in the rush to gain political advantage.

At the heart of our faith lies a determination not to define people in ways that limit their humanity but only in ways that expand it. Psalm 139 is a wonderful example of this:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!  
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.  
3 You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

Do read the whole psalm and rediscover that you are known – and have always been known – not by populist or political definitions but by God for who you are.

We call God “Lord” though that is a very poor translation of the Hebrew Yahweh, meaning ‘I AM’ and has all sorts of connotations in our class culture. I wonder if ‘I AM’ isn’t a pretty good name for all of humanity too. Imagine a world in which you are not defined by your income, home, accent, education, occupation or any of the other definitions that society uses to include or exclude you, but simply, out of the deepest of respect for your humanity, you are called: I AM.

This week our children begin to return to school and I hope more of you will take me up on the ‘card’ suggestion in this week’s newsletters. It is tragic that hundreds of thousands of children are learning through the exam fiasco that they are not equal long before they hear that they are a child of God, made in God’s image. Never has our schools’ ministry been more needed; never has it faced as many obstacles as it does today.

Please pray for our schools and look out for our September prayer diary too. Praying for our church life is so important and your prayers are so appreciated.

May you see Christ’s light of hope and joy shining brightly through your week.

With every blessing:  
David Ford, Rector