

## John 1:43-end

The Church of England is changing, and this affects us all. We are being asked to adjust to a different pattern to that which has become so familiar over many years. The reason for this is the reducing number of priests in stipendiary, paid, ministry. This is being accelerated by the impact of the coronavirus, particularly on the finances of the dioceses. But it may be that we can find a better way of doing ministry, where each member of every church develops their gifts and abilities to use in the mission and ministry of the church, and relies much less on a paid vicar. The future pattern is for every church to have ordained and licensed ministry, but for many the vicar will not be paid! Those priests who are paid will cover a wider area of churches, working alongside lay ministry in each church. The Church of Christ has been around for 2,000 years, and I'm sure will continue to thrive and grow, but the world is changing and so must the church. Jesus is still calling people to follow him, and to build his church, as he is calling each of us today!

Our gospel reading shows us how two disciples, Philip and Nathanael, were called to follow Jesus, immediately after Jesus had called Andrew and Peter.

Jesus sees **Philip** and simply gives him a clear call, '*Follow me*', and Philip follows. Presumably Philip had already heard Jesus speaking, and been convinced by Jesus' words and actions, but was waiting to be invited to become a disciple.

Philip was rather diffident, lacking in confidence and needed such a simple and clear call. Maybe you are like Philip, thinking '*surely God is not interested in me*', but God is, and loves you, and is calling you, and has a part for you to play in his church.

Philip then calls **Nathanael**. This is the way the Church grows, by one person calling another to join. Nathanael is initially dismissive of Jesus, '*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*' We often downplay what is familiar to us. Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee, close to the small town of Nazareth, and may well have looked down on these neighbours. Perhaps Nathanael looked to the big cities, places and people of power and wealth, expecting to find God there, but that is not God's way at all.

When Jesus sees Nathanael, he sees into his heart, '*Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!*' Jesus then tells Nathanael that he saw him under a fig tree.

The fig tree was a place of God's blessing for his people, of security and peace.

Jesus' insight into Nathanael's life leads him to believe, and exclaim '*You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!*'

Maybe you are like Nathanael? Looking for security and peace, but looking in the wrong places. Jesus offers real peace of heart and mind, genuine security for all eternity.

So Jesus continues to call each of us differently, according to our nature, with all our faults, failings, and questions, to follow him. Each of us is known and loved by Jesus, yet we are called to be together, to be his church here in this place in 2021, even if we cannot physically meet together at the moment.

Jesus called me over 45 years ago, and still calls me every day to follow him, with lots still to learn; it's an adventure, challenging, often not easy, but the very best way to live.

When Jesus calls us, like those first disciples, he graciously gives us to one another, we are not called alone, but with others. We are part of the **Church**, his body on earth, called to carry on his work today, and filled with the same Holy Spirit, the helper.

How will you respond today, whether for the first time or for the thousandth time, to follow Jesus in the company of his Church, to offer your gifts and abilities to God, to serve his church in all the changes that 2021 will bring?