

John 1:43-51 and Rev 5:1-10

Nathaniel had been watched.

It was perfectly sensible to sit in the shade of a spreading fig tree. You might sit there on your own, making the most of the peace and quiet for meditation and prayer. You might sit there with friends or a teacher, for a quiet discussion. It was perfectly normal in the climate and culture of the time, and would have excited no comment at all.

Yet, Nathaniel, under a fig tree, was being watched.

The story of the law and the prophets that he had heard read from the scroll in the Temple or Synagogue, might well have been explained to Nathaniel under a fig tree by the rabbi of his community. It was also quite possibly a place where he'd have learnt the prejudices of his elders, listening to their stories of the rivalry that existed between villages. Nathaniel had heard, and learnt, many things, about God, about his religion, and about his community, whilst sat under a fig tree.

But whilst he was sat under a fig tree listening to others, he was being watched.

By Jesus.

Of course, Nathaniel didn't know that. All he knew was that today his friend Philip was full to bursting with a bit of news. Philip and his friends thought they'd found the person who would fulfil the prophecies of Isaiah, the promised ruler for King David's throne, the Messiah (Is 9:6-7 and Is 11:1-5) But it was just that, news. Something else to listen to. And the fact that Philip said this person came from Nazareth fed all the prejudices that Nathaniel had learnt; Philip's excitement was just words, easily dismissed,... until Philip said "Come and see".

Sitting under a fig tree listening to others was no help. Getting up and discovering that the man Philip spoke of had been watching and listening to him without him being aware, made a significant difference.

It was only when Nathaniel had been drawn away from his place of safety under the fig tree, the place where his hearing senses dominated, that he is able to actually see the truth of Philip's words, and use his natural abilities as a down-to-earth Israelite to recognise Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah. There was no point just using words with Nathaniel, he had to see for himself.

In some senses Jesus was just like him, a down-to-earth, blunt-talking Israelite who knew his scriptures. But Israel's purpose as God's people had been to provide the means of bridging the gap between heaven and earth, repairing God's broken creation, initiating God's rescue plan among people's who were intent on destroying God's handiwork. Unfortunately Israel was a little too hung-up in its old prejudices, rather more intent on reciting scripture than getting out and looking to be its fulfilment. Until he got out from under the fig-tree, Nathaniel was a good representation of an Israel too fractured and hidebound by tradition to be able to break the seals on God's rescue plan.

Jesus was the image of what Israel should have been, had indeed been created for. What Nathaniel saw in Jesus in those first moments of personal engagement, and the realisation that Jesus had been watching over and listening to him for a significant period, was the power of Israel's royalty, combined with a gentle vulnerability that enabled people to encounter him on their own terms. Jesus: the lion and the lamb, something to be spoken about, and something to be seen for yourself; a true Israelite of the house of David and the 'lion-cub' tribe of Judah (Gen 29:9), and the slaughtered sacrificial lamb of Passover, through

whom Israel was saved, and by whom all the people's of the world would now be bought the opportunity of new life. Jesus was a piece of news worth getting out of the shade of a fig tree for.

Only Jesus could show Nathaniel that he was visible and listened to by God.

Only Jesus could be both the lion and the lamb of Israel's people.

Only Jesus could provide from Israel the fulfilment of God's original creative intention to heal the world and it's people of the broken-ness which had become endemic.

Only Jesus could bring about a new covenant and a new kingdom that would start to bring earth and heaven together.

Only Jesus could enable us to sing a new song to God as the priesthood of all believers.

We are being watched.

It's perfectly appropriate to have places of meditation and prayer where we feel at peace. It's perfectly reasonable to sit in the shade of a metaphorical fig-tree, listening to and discussing what it is that scripture says about the future. It's indeed not uncommon for those discussions to wander off and feed our own prejudices about different elements of the community we live in.

But it's worth remembering that we are being watched, and listened to, by Jesus.

If we haven't already, soon we're going to have to leave listening and talking behind, get out from under our fig-tree, and go and meet the Jesus who has been watching and listening to us, and knows us through and through, prejudices and all. Are we ready to see more? Are we ready to encounter the power of the lion and the sacrifice of the lamb?

Some of us have got out from under the fig tree before. We've recognised that through those that come and talk to us, we hear news about what God is doing that is worth going out and seeing for ourselves. But when the fig tree provides plenty of shade from the heat of the sun, and life wears us to a frazzle, a little comfort and company can do wonders for our energy levels. However, then we have to remember it's not necessarily where we're going to encounter Jesus. We have to get up and go meet the next piece of good news.

I can't necessarily tell you where we must go to find Jesus, but it means knowing we are being listened to and seen by Jesus as we work out where we go, and will involve listening to and seeing others. Part of that starts over the next ten days as our two PCCs coming together to listen to each other and God as to the direction we go in making sure Jesus is seen in our communities, our mission and our worship. A small group of us are also going to listen and help Jesus and this church be seen at the wedding fair at Warbrook House next Sunday.

There will be other things. It might be sitting and listening to children read in school, seeing whether the school want people to return to gardening for them, or joining the Open The Book team so that the children meet Jesus. It may be that we have to spend time finding a non-threatening way to tell the people who come and sit under the local trees about Jesus, like the horse-riders who frequent Church Green, or the families who use the play area. It could be that in encouraging the community to recycle things the council won't accept, and finding a site and a mechanism for doing so, we might be more like Jesus himself, bringing healing to God's creation. Whatever the things are that we do, they will be a new song, a song that lives and celebrates the power and the sacrifice of Jesus.