



Developing and Strengthening our Imagination: Picturing the Christ within

An address for an Agape ● 14th February 2010 ● Rev Louise

Opening Prayer:

*Let us pray:
We seek the things that are above.
We set our minds on things above.
We pray that the image of Christ may be formed within us.*

*Lift us above ourselves.
Lift us above the mundane.
Lift us beyond the limited horizon.
Lift us above our limitations.
Lift us into your presence.
Lift us into that which is the highest and the greatest.
Take away from us all that hinders us and limits us.
Grant us to see the panorama that you have set before us.
Make us aware of the grandeur of what is possible for us your children.
And in that freedom, in that moment of limitless existence
may we perceive you high above everything,
pure and pristine with your love shining towards us,
beckoning us further and further.
In the name of Christ we pray.
So shall it be.*

We know that Nathanael is the disciple who speaks to us of the faculty of imagination. We can read of his calling by Christ to be an apostle in John's Gospel.

*The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And 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 of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathan-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."
John 1:43-51*

There are some distinct characteristics of imagination which are apparent from noticing how Nathanael behaves and what he says. We can begin to get a greater sense of what

imagination is and how we can develop and strengthen this faculty within us, when we look into this passage.

Firstly, we notice that Nathanael asks questions. There is questioning, thoughtfulness and discernment. There is a 'look before you leap' quality in Nathanael. He's not going to take things at face value but will look further, more deeply and want to know more. He questions: *Can anything good come from Nazareth?* he asks. *How do you know me?* he asks Jesus. Coupled with this questioning is an openness and willingness. He does not close himself, but willingly follows Phillip.

This questioning and discernment leads to another characteristic evident in Nathanael. There is the ability to recognise truth, and to really know truth. Nathanael also believes and trusts what he perceives. He says, *You are the son of God, the King of Israel.* He recognises Christ and then is willing to acknowledge his rulership and to surrender to it. He places himself with Christ, attuned to him; he has surrendered and made a commitment. He is convinced and convincing in his response to Christ.

This passage sees Jesus say to him, *You are an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile.* There's no deceit or pretence in Nathanael. This statement also speaks about identity and individuality. I think here of Jacob and the change of his name to Israel. Christ is identifying Nathanael in a particular way. Nathanael belongs to a new race of spiritual individuals who are identified with spirit and the bringing of humanity and spirit into unity and connection. It is the imagination and in the imaginative realms where we can cross the divide between spirit and matter, between soul and spirit. Christ recognises and identifies him as one who has changed, who has identified himself with spirit.

Christ saw Nathanael sitting under a fig tree. Before they met face to face, Christ saw him. He was able to perceive him. This suggests that Nathanael was in a consciousness which made him visible and perceptible to Christ.

We could think of the fig tree as a place within ourselves, and this place is what makes it possible for us to connect with Christ. When the fig tree is mentioned it is often associated with the bodhi tree under which the Buddha received enlightenment. It is a place of silence, of contemplation, of enlightenment, of communing with the spirit. It is the place where spirit can break through into our conscious soul life. This consciousness was alive in Nathanael and so Christ could perceive him in the world of spirit.

The fig tree also brings to mind the etheric body, the heart centre; the possibility of heart knowing, and awakening the memories of the past and images and the future.

Finally Jesus says, *You will see greater things.* Nathanael was going to see the angels ascending and descending upon the son of man. He would see heaven opened; he would see into the spiritual worlds. This is the reality.

We are asked to know Christ more deeply, from a spiritual point of view; to learn the language of spirit and approach Christ in this way, rather than expecting that we will understand with our human language. It is a two-way communication. It is not just about receiving messages from the spirit but being conscious of what images are alive in us which flow to the spiritual worlds. What are we offering to the spiritual worlds?

Discernment and questioning, openness and willingness, recognition and perception, surrender and commitment – these are the characteristics which Nathanael portrays and which deepen our experience of the spiritual faculty of imagination. These will strengthen our imagination and thus our ability to know and communicate in the language of spirit.

The Year of Imagination

Rev Antoinette reminded us in the 'Dedication and Spiritual Focus for 2010' that it was beholding the image of ourselves as a perfected and fully divine human being which set in motion this life we are living now. Our will was activated by this image and so we know that images of spiritual reality are very powerful and creative in their effects. Imagination, images determine what happens, what manifests.

Rev Antoinette said to us that in this year of Imagination, in our Centre life, we would devote ourselves:

- to becoming aware of these images,
- to being discerning of the images we entertain within us and between us,
- and, above all, to building up within ourselves the image of Christ.

Rev Antoinette urges us to become spiritually perceptive, to come to know the language of spirit. There are some things which are helpful to us in learning the language of spirit. For example, silence and stillness are needed to receive, contemplate and behold the pictures within. Rev Antoinette suggests that to become more image conscious we can look to art, live music and drama.

The Bible is filled with images and she pointed us to the images of the kingdom of heaven which can inspire and bring us closer to the spirit: the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, it is like a treasure hidden in a field, it is like a merchant in search of fine pearls.

These spiritual images of truth, if we take them within ourselves, will remain within our soul long after our life on earth is over; they are not transitory and fleeting. They continue to work and remain alive in the world of spirit, even when our earth consciousness has been extinguished. It is therefore important that we take care about the pictures we entertain, that we create and that we convey and portray to others.

By working with our imagination and the images which arise with us we free our minds, we create movement within us. We activate our will and our capacity to spiritually create. We are more able to enter the new, to leave behind old ideas and structures and create new ways and expressions of our soul. If we have this living relationship with spirit we can enter new realms, remain open to new impulses rather than stand still and become stultified.

But, as Rev Antoinette said, the great work for this year will be to build up and strengthen within ourselves the image of Christ, pictures of the Christ in us, working in our souls.

She encouraged us to create our own image of the Christ within our souls. Not pictures of Jesus – pictures of Christ in you. Again, the Bible is a starting point – taking these within ourselves, strengthening these images through our meditations, conversations, day-dreaming, silences.

Silence and stillness

We're going to enter into a meditation in a few moments. To assist us to be ready I am going to read some quotes from Mario and consider for a time the power of silence. A beautiful Psalm which speaks of this is Psalm 62. *For God alone my soul waits in silence;...*

Silence brings us closer to God. Silence is peace and devotion. Silence is filling the soul with the contents of the spirit. ... and in the silence (we can) behold the heavens opened and perceive the workings of the secrets of the kingdom of the Gods.

In silence, God is creating, God is moving, God is present. In silence we can direct ourselves to God and to our innermost self. The still small voice needs silence to be heard. It needs the quietness, it needs the harmony. Only then can one listen to the real thing that lies within us.

Christ speaks to you in the silence of your heart, when everything is quiet, when there is no desire any more, no wanting any more, just the contentment of being with your beloved. Then Christ will speak, but there must first be that contentment, that no-need to have anything.

It takes a silence within to hear the spirit, to recognise the spirit, the divine, the I AM, the Christ. Our emotions, reactions, needs and desires can overwhelm our capacity to be in touch with the spirit, so silence is necessary. In the silence we set aside our feelings, our thoughts and opinions, our needs.

Silence is a state of being, a quality of the soul. We can be busy, active and yet we have silence, a place for the spirit in our being – under the fig tree perhaps. In silence the soul and spirit, the soul and the I AM can hear and express the living images of spirit. In silence there is room in our soul for the presence of spirit.

In this silence we will hear our spirit and also the spirit in one another. It is a silence we create in our being which makes room for the spirit. This silence allows the soul to hear and be in touch with the spirit. We become perceptive and perceptible by Christ; we can see and be seen, we can know and be known.

Meditation: Strengthening the image of Christ within us.

Choose an image – this may be one you've been contemplating for some time, or it may be another of the Bible images of Christ: Christ with the woman at the well, Christ washing the feet of the disciples, Christ wearing the crown of thorns, Christ on the cross, I AM the true vine, I AM the good shepherd, the risen Christ showing his wounds to the disciples, Christ healing the man by the pool, Christ breaking bread with his disciples, I AM the bread of life, the Lamb of God, I AM the Light of the World.

Settle on an image or a picture of Christ as it speaks to you. Allow this picture to become clearer. Notice the shapes, the colours, the movements.

Let this picture remain with you; feel what flows towards you from it. Feel what flows from you towards it. Allow it to come closer. Can you move towards it?

What is emerging in you? What are you feeling and experiencing?

Take this image and let it enter more deeply into you. Feel its contours entering the contours of your soul.

A Time of Silence

Prayer

*We come, Father,
with thanksgiving and joy in our hearts,
because we have found acceptance
and a flowing of your power
and your life through us;
we have experienced the reality of those things
we so often talk and think about.
We thank you that, because you have accepted us,
we can now approach you
and consciously become at one with you
in this moment of quietness and silence,
of searching and revelation.
We pray that we may have an attitude
of quietly and silently expecting from you
the miracle that will set us free.
We pray that you will assist us
to remain in that quiet waiting attitude,
for we know that those who wait upon the Lord
are not disappointed.
This we pray in the name of Christ.
So shall it be.*

Prayer

*O Father,
who rules this world with equity and love,
grant that we who have been chosen by you,
from the foundation of the world,
may become very conscious
of the presence of the Christ within our souls,
and conscious also of the office which we have accepted
and the relationship of that office to yourself and others.
Grant also that we may understand deeper
the greater power given to us
and the privileges and responsibilities,
and help us in our search and seeking
to attain more and more to that image
which the risen Christ places before us.
And may we who have said, "Yes,"
continue to present the living Christ
in all its dazzling beauty to those around about us.
In the name of Christ, So shall it be.*

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