**Sunday 14th January 2024; Epiphany 2, Benefice Holy Communion, Ampleforth.**

**“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael makes his assumption. Do you ever make any assumptions? If we are honest with ourselves, we would answer that emphatically as a ‘Yes’.**

**We make all sorts of other assumptions every day, about other people; what they say, what they look like, how they behave, what they think or believe. Other times we look at situations, the state of the country and the Church, how they are run, the attitudes we perceive of other people such as teenagers, and young people. We make assumptions about whether people, or things, are ‘Christian’ or not, and if they say they are what their tradition or style of worship should or shouldn’t be. Do we then say that nothing good comes out of these things? Then there are those times we look at ourselves or a part of our life; maybe it is a secret we have carried for years, the illness we face each day, the hurts we have caused others, the loneliness of grief, and we say, ‘How can anything good come out of this?’**

**We may or may not express our assumptions out loud, but they rattle through our heads and influence what we think. Sometimes the assumptions we make destroy relationships, love, and life because we think we know more than we really do. Assumptions act as limitations; they narrow our vision; they close off the possibility of change and growth. They may deny the possibility of reconciliation and healing, a different way of being, or a new life. Ultimately, they may impoverish our faith and proclaim there is no room for God.**

**“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”, Nathaniel askes in our Gospel reading today. We all have our ‘Nazareth’s.’ where assumptions are mostly about us, our fears, prejudices, guilt, losses, our wounds. We take our past experiences, real or imagined, and project them onto another person or situation, which becomes our own ’Nazareth’. These assumptions can keep life shallow and superficial, and we risk missing out on a deeper knowing and being known.**

**At the deepest level our ‘Nazareth’s’ are about our understanding of ourselves and of God. Sometimes we, like Nathaniel, can’t see how anything good can come out of it. We cannot believe that God could be present, active, and revealed in our ‘Nazareth’ whether it be another person, a relationship or situation, or our own life. That makes it hard to see life amid death, hope in places of despair, and the good and beautiful in what looks like the bad and ugly. It’s sometimes easier, just to assume and our Nazareth becomes a blind spot. For God, however, Nazareth is the place of His glorious and saving revelation.**

**It is no coincidence that Nathanael is sitting under the fig tree when he makes his comment. It is the fig tree that gave Adam and Eve the leaves behind which they hid from God and themselves. It is the fig tree that Jesus will later curse for producing no fruit because it has no signs of life. Our assumptions can become our hiding places where we bear no fruit where we stop ourselves from engaging fully with life, ourselves, each other, and God. But Jesus emerges from the ‘Nazareth’s’ of our lives and calls us out from under our fig tree and whenever we leave it, we open ourselves to see God present and at work in the most unexpected places and people because as the assumptions fall a new life and world arise.**

**The fulfilment of God’s promises and earthly life begin in Nazareth when Luke records Jesus proclaiming in the synagogue that in Him Scripture has been fulfilled. The last place we would have thought that possible is the first place God chooses and He invites us to ‘come and see.’ Our salvation and healing may occur where we thought nothing good could happen. Reconciliation and love will be revealed in relationships were we certain nothing good could come from and the seemingly hopeless situations of life will begin to bear fruit. We will hear words of forgiveness and compassion spoken by people we were sure could never say such things. God puts lives back together in Nazareth.**

**God does not allow himself to be limited by our assumptions because He has the full picture. As Philip says to Nathaniel, for every ‘Nazareth’ we have, there is an invitation to “come and see.” For every assumption we make there is a deeper truth to be discovered, a new relationship to be experienced, and a new life to be lived and if we put our assumptions to aside, our ‘Nazareth’s’ will become the place of God’s epiphany, because the One who is all and brings true life comes out of Nazareth. Thanks be to God. Amen.**