

Is there something of the contemplative about Nathanael, sitting under his fig tree and able to address Jesus in such a direct manner? Something of the contemplative, not because he has any more right or justification for criticising or judging others, but because he has fewer barriers between himself and reality, between himself and the truth of reality, and this can be as much an embarrassment to him as to others, getting him into trouble for speaking truly, for noticing the elephant in the room. In saying, ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ he may simply be voicing what everyone else would be wanting to say, would assume is true, but not dare to speak. So he is without guile, without any intention of deceit, of leading Jesus on, for example, to say something he might regret; to trap him as so many others were attempting to do at the time or soon after. And one is reminded of such as Greta Thunberg, able to speak truth to power because of this child-like directness, or of the court jester telling necessary truth to a king without fear of having his head cut off. The person, then, we all need to disabuse us of our illusions but able to see us as we really are in that most positive of senses as God sees us – beloved despite our limitations. It’s comforting to know that one of the foundation stones of the Church is just such a person, even now encouraged, perhaps, to speak truth to the other apostles as they sit in judgement over us – one in whom we can place our trust because he will voice God’s love for us whatever we might have done to disown it. Just a thought I had sitting under a fig tree – or that’s what I wanted to say after I thought of it in my room upstairs so then I went and sat under the fig tree in the hope that there might still be some truth in it – and in me.

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