

17th Jan 2021 John 1.43-51 'Come and See'

This Sunday we journey on rapidly in our gospel readings - from the baptism of Jesus last Sunday, now to the call of his first disciples. All four gospel writers give account of Jesus calling men to follow him, and it's clear that Jesus has by this stage already exercised some public ministry - he has become known in the region as a teacher with great authority, and as a worker of miracles with astonishing authority. Now we see his authority again at work as he calls young men to leave their livelihoods and to become his apprentices; learning the way of the kingdom.

There's an excitement in our passage as Jesus is becoming known more widely, and as he calls people to himself, we see those people drawing other people to come and see what this rabbi is all about.

'Come and See' - says Philip to Nathanel in verse 46 - 'Come and See'. Philip is one of the first evangelists in the gospels.

So I am going to speak about evangelism this morning.  
Evangelism is a word sadly laden with negative overtones.

Those of you who watch the cartoon called 'the Simpsons' will know the character Ned Flanders. He is the archetype Christian evangelist – devout and sincere, with bad facial hair, systematically destroying relationships with his neighbours through totally inappropriate faith sharing.

But in recent years in the secular job market evangelism has become the buzz word. Companies are falling over each other to hire marketing evangelists, digital evangelists, brand evangelists.

And the reason is obvious – everyone is trying to get in on the business of word-of-mouth marketing. Especially with new social media. The best thing you can possibly do as a company is get your customers to tell their own friends about your brand. **There is nothing more persuasive and effective than friends telling their own friends that they tried something and found it to be great.**

Modern companies may now be on to this – but it was God’s idea from the beginning. And so I want to encourage you this morning – – no matter how long or short a time you have been a follower of Jesus - **consider your call to be an evangelist.**

Lets take a look at the passage. John chapter 1 verse 43

**Jesus calls people to follow him, who in turn go and find people to follow him.**

Our reading from verse 43 begins with Philip. Jesus already has two disciples, Andrew and Simon-Peter from Bethsaida. Number three is Philip. Not a random stranger, but also from Andrew and Simon’s hometown Bethsaida.

**What Philip receives is encounter. Transformational encounter.**

Philip meets Jesus face to face and hears that personal authoritative call on his life. Because of that encounter Philip reaches the same incredible conviction as his two friends. This man Jesus is God’s King – he’s the one we’ve all been waiting for – this is **‘the One’** the prophets told us about, he’s going to bring God’s Kingdom.

And this is such good and exciting news, Philip wants to tell others about Jesus. Philip doesn't know very much, he just believes that God's promised Saviour is here. It is enough for him to head off and find his friend Nathanael.

Philip says to Nathanael - 'We have found the one'. That word 'found' in the Greek, you will all know it- is the word 'eureka' - a great exciting sense of discovery.

Jesus is Philip's 'eureka' - we have found God's promised Saviour - Nathanael this is great news, he is Jesus of Nazareth.

And Philip's friend, Nathanael is not very impressed with Philip's enthusiasm. Nathanael has doubts. ....he is sceptical.

At this point I wonder whether the passage rings true for your experience? I hope you know what it is to encounter Jesus, who is alive today by his Spirit. I hope you have heard His authoritative personal call over your life. I hope you have discovered Him as your 'eureka' - the fulfilment of all God's promises. And then perhaps you have tried to share your discovery with a non-Christian friend and found that your friend is very sceptical.

Most people are very sceptical. And, like Nathanael, most people's objections are entirely reasonable.

So what's Nathanael's problem?

Philip says “We have found Jesus of Nazareth” and Nathaniel replies ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’

Nazareth was a town with a rather dud reputation. People from Nazareth were looked down on by everyone else – the Nazarenes were the butt of jokes. I have a lot of sympathy with this because I was born and raised in **Essex** , which does not always inspire people’s confidence..

When I was a teenager I really wanted to get into Cambridge University – so I applied, and I had everything I needed – the grades, and music, and sport, and community service – and they called me for interview - I was very nervous, neither of my parents had been to university so it was a big aspiration. I showed up and waited nervously outside; the man called me into his wood panelled study, he looked across at me and before I had had a chance to sit down, he said “So you’re an Essex girl are you?”

Every country has its dud bit and Nazareth was the Essex of Judea.

Nathaniel's question is a good one. Nazareth – ‘how could the Messiah possibly be from a town with no status?’

And Philip’s response is brilliant. Because he does not even try to answer the question: he says to his friend

‘Come and see.’

‘Come and meet Him, you have to see for yourself, and make up your own mind.’

This invitation to others to encounter Jesus Christ is the very best evangelism we can do. Come and encounter him for yourself. That is the invitation – that is what we have to offer the world.

Philip does not sit down with his friend and explain everything there is to know about the Old Testament, and how Jesus WAS from a Royal City of David because he was born in **Bethlehem**.

He could have done that, but we are not trying to answer everyone's questions perfectly. Becoming a Christian is not about understanding everything and signing up to a list of beliefs or rules of behaviour. These things are what many of our friends and colleagues **think** Christianity is. They think it is a set of beliefs, rules of behaviour, an invitation to join a fairly narrow minded religious social club.

Philip's instinct is that Nathaniel simply has to come and meet Jesus himself. And we must do the same. Because our calling is to introduce our friends to a **person**. The person of Jesus - He who is alive and real, who speaks and changes lives. Someone **we ourselves** have encountered and been transformed by – The One who is the fulfillment of all the promises of God the Father.

So Philip says to his friend – 'you have to come and meet this Jesus for yourself.'

When Nathaniel meets Jesus , it is a moment of supernatural revelation for him. It's a great reminder that we can play our part in pointing people to Jesus, but it is the Holy Spirit who does the miracle of grace. And Nathaniel – with most of his questions completely unanswered – says "Rabbi you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel".

There have been many many hardships and struggles of this pandemic. Deep loss, devastating bereavement and trauma. It has

been a profoundly painful time in our parishes and in our churches. But at that same time, the story of the church is also one of this being a season of fruitful evangelism. The pandemic may have stopped churches meeting physically, but it has not stopped new people meeting Jesus and joining his family. There's churches where many people have come to faith through online Alpha or Christianity Explored, there's book groups where people have invited their neighbours to discuss faith online, there's all manner of community outreach - ministries of serving people, feeding and clothing people, offering help with debt and unemployment, loneliness - where even in a time of pandemic we have had opportunities not just to bless others with material provision, but also God has opened up conversations that have led people into faith in Jesus.

So can I encourage you all this morning - to see in this scripture the grace and authority with which Jesus calls people to himself.

May you each be reminded of your first love, that first 'eureka' moment of discovering the Jesus who changes everything,

And to be inspired by the simplicity of our role, each one of us, as evangelists in the Kingdom of God. Would you pray that this week, you would have an opportunity to say to someone else - 'Come and See', 'come and explore Jesus for yourself and make up your own mind'. And with that opportunity, pray for God to give you courage when the moment arrives.

For many of us, that will be a scary prayer. But let's pray it anyway.

Amen.

