

Date 15/01/2023
Day: The 2nd Sunday in Epiphany Year A
Congregation: St Chad's, Linwood
First Reading: Isaiah 49: 1-7
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9
Gospel: John 1: 29-42

I understand that famous people often get greeted by strangers who see a familiar face – know that they know that person somehow – and so acknowledge them even if at that moment they can't recall where they know them from. It probably causes the person who greeted them some embarrassment later when they remember just why that person looked familiar – and maybe some frustration that they weren't quick enough to ask for a photograph with the famous one that they greeted like a long-lost friend.

It is not quite like that for Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. As yet he is not universally recognised and until now he has been able to set about God's mission for him without being mobbed. But that is about to change. Because he walks towards John – his cousin, the one to whom he went for baptism in the Jordan – and John knows who he is. Has known for some time and certainly had it confirmed at Jesus' baptism when the Spirit of God came upon

Jesus and made it clear both to Jesus and to John, that he was the chosen one of God.

John is standing with some of his disciples, those who have been excited by what he was doing and saying, and so became followers of his. All along John has been clear that he is not the Messiah, the one that the people were expecting to come and lead them to a new relationship with God, but he has been predicting the arrival of this promised One and so his disciples remain with him. But when he sees Jesus approaching, John knows that the time has come to step back from what he has been doing as there is no longer any need to announce the imminent arrival of Jesus – he is now come into his time. And so John does what he knows he must and reveals Jesus to his followers.

It is followed up the next day when Jesus again goes past and John again declares that here is the one long expected by the Jewish people. It must have been both a sad and a happy moment for John as his two disciples left him to now follow Jesus. His role was done and had been done faithfully in announcing and preparing

people for Jesus' coming. As Jesus came fully into his ministry it was time for John to step back and instead direct people to follow Jesus himself.

And in John's role we see the model of what it is to be a disciple; proclaiming and witnessing to the love and mercy of God but always pointing beyond ourselves to God so that people see not us with our failings and frailties but the God who enables us to live fully in spite of them.

Andrew and the other disciple are excited and curious enough to follow this man that John is pointing out. They trail behind him without really knowing what to do or say so, when Jesus turns around and asks them "What are you looking for?" they seem to say the first thing that comes into their head – "Where are you staying?" Curiosity is all that Jesus needs to work with and the two are invited to "Come and see" and end up spending the day with Jesus.

These two could have remained trailing behind Jesus; following but not engaging with him, as many other would go on to do. The stories of Jesus' ministry talk of the crowds that followed him, some because they wanted healing, other to hear his teaching, and some who hoped that he would lead them in a rebellion against the ruling Romans. They would follow behind but far enough back that they could see what happened without having to actually have to engage with Jesus and especially with his question "What are you looking for?"

We see that in our times too – people who want some association with Jesus, with God, but who hold back from answering the question "What are you looking for?" because they don't want to face what could be a complete change of direction and focus in their life. Stepping out in faith can be a scary thing to do, even while at the same time it is exciting to be on a path that God is directing and at times people hold back from a commitment because of that.

Jesus would have known that Andrew and his friend didn't really only want to know where he was staying; that was an answer that came quickly to their minds but was not the question that they would really have wanted to ask. But by the end of the day that unasked question had been answered and Andrew was able to tell his brother Peter – “We have found the Messiah!” because they had accepted Jesus invitation to come and see for themselves.

We can put ourselves into that scene because Jesus asks us that same question as to what we are looking for. And his response to the answer – whatever we say – is the same - an invitation to “Come and see.” Whatever we lack – or yearn for – or sincerely want for our spiritual lives can be found by accepting that invitation and setting out on a journey with Jesus. Whatever we feel we lack in our lives, whatever pain or guilt we carry that we want to have lifted, or whatever gift we have that we know we are not using to its' fullest extent – these can all be repaired through God's love. It does mean us making that commitment to follow Jesus in life, not hanging back and watching from a distance but right up close to him and sharing our lives with him.

I believe it is worth noting that each of the encounters we heard about in today's gospel came about through another person. John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to Andrew and the other disciple. After his own encounter with Jesus, Andrew went to bring Peter so he would have his own experience. Later in this same gospel we hear that Philip sought out Nathanael to tell him that he had found the one that the prophets had spoken about and when Nathanael asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth, Philip challenged him to “Come and see.”

And that is another aspect of discipleship; we saw John's selfless promotion of Jesus as his own role diminished and his encouragement of his own disciples to transfer their devotion to the One he had heralded as his life's mission. The next step, as shown by John and Andrew, and later Philip (as well as others) is to invite people to come with us to see Jesus – to come and see for themselves. Not all of those who follow Jesus are going to have the kind of following that John attracted – the thousands who went out into the desert to hear his words of promise and admonishment.

Most of us do not have that kind of ministry; instead we have the chance, through our daily lives, to relate to people on a one-to-one basis. That is an opportunity for a personal expression of our faith and what it means to us, how it guides how we live, gets us through the tough times that everyone experiences as well as enhancing the joyful times we have. In that way we encourage and intrigue others to want to know and have what we have.

Jesus may not have been a familiar face at the beginning of his ministry, at least until John the Baptist pointed him out. But, thanks to the work of generations of faithful disciples he is famous to us and no-one need ever be shy about approaching him. To all those who seek him Jesus will greet them like the long-lost friend that they are with the question “What are you looking for?” and really want to receive a truthful and heartfelt answer.