

***Jesus invites us into a relationship where he becomes known***

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Revd Rebecca Newland

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*Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 40:1-14, 1 Corinthians 1.1-9, John 1:29-42*

So this is now the second Sunday of Epiphany. As you know Epiphany is about the revelation of who and what Jesus is. Last week I concentrated on the key idea that Jesus is the servant of God and that the passage from Isaiah gave us some insights into what this service was about. In today's gospel we have a feast of ideas about Jesus. He is revealed as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God and as a Rabbi, a teacher. All of these mind-boggling concepts are theologically rich and almost too heavy for the passage that contains them. John's gospel is like that but even he admits that his words about Jesus are not the only ones that could be written. He ends his gospel with these lines: "There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

There must be more things written about Jesus than any other person on the planet yet there is still more and more being written. There are so many things to say about Jesus, so many concepts and things to explore. All those sermons, all those books, all those Radio National programs and interviews, all those essays and words by philosophers, atheists, anarchists, Marxists, theologians, scientists, politicians and nameless university students. Here are just some a couple of things that have been said about Jesus.

From Napoleon Bonaparte: "I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him."

Mahatma Gandhi: "A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act."

Florence Nightingale: "People talk about imitating Christ, and imitate him in the little trifling formal things, such as washing the feet, saying his prayer, and so on; but if anyone attempts the real imitation of him, there are no bounds to the outcry with which the presumption of that person is condemned."

Douglas Adams: "2,000 years ago one man got nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be if everyone was nice to each other for a change."

I could of course go on and on but you get the picture. Every one it seems has something to say about Jesus. We are practically drowning in a sea of ideas and concepts about him = Lamb of God, the Messiah, Son of God, the Christ and all the rest that the world cannot contain.

The words are important but there is something else in our Gospel passage that puts all of these words in their place and points us to the one and only necessary thing. It is found in the simple exchange between Jesus and the two potential disciples.

The two disciples hear John say, "Look, here is the Lamb of God" and they start to follow Jesus. Jesus notices, turns around and says his first words in the gospel, "What are you looking for?"

When they ask a question in return, “Where are you going?” he says, “Come and see”.

Jesus first words in the entire gospel comprise a question about intent: “What are you looking for?” This question is a focusing question and is perhaps one all would be disciples of Jesus need to hear him ask. What we are looking for will often determine what we will notice and believe we have found. What we look for will be something we lack, something we need or something we desire. The answer to that question will be the motivator that gets us moving and committed to words and actions.

However, the two would be disciples do not give a clear answer. They have heard John the baptist say that Jesus is the Lamb of God and although their Jewish heritage may have helped them begin to understand what this may mean it would have still sounded strange and off key. After all the concept of the Lamb of God is a big picture concept that reaches its most compelling revelation in, appropriately, the Book of Revelation. Perhaps then these first disciples simply know that they are looking—for something, for some answer, for some hope or purpose. What they do recognize in Jesus is that he is a teacher and a great teacher at that.

The word Rabbi is a Hebrew word meaning ‘my master’. The word ‘master’, *rav* in Hebrew, literally means ‘great one’. Apparently, as a sign of respect some great rabbis are simply called ‘The Rav’. This great teacher, the man they have begun to call master.

The two would be disciples do not have a clear answer for Jesus but they have a question — “where are you going?” they ask. Because Jesus is not sitting down when they find him and he is not walking towards them and offering them anything. He is literally walking by, walking on past them. Jesus answer is a simple and beautiful answer, full of hospitality and openness. Words of course that we are very familiar with here at St Philip’s because Philip uses the exact same phrase a little later in this passage when Nathanael challenges him about Jesus. Jesus says, ‘Come and see.

Jesus doesn’t say, “Go and ask John, he can tell you all you need to know”. He also doesn’t say, “Read this book, do this course, go and talk to that priest, teacher or guru”. He says, “Come and see”. Come and see for yourselves where I am going. Come and see who I am. Come and see and the answer will be revealed as you follow. And they do. They spend the day with him. They walk beside him. They spend time with him. Andrew we know at least became his disciple and brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus.

Peter begins to follow as well and perhaps he was just as vague about his initial motivations as his brother Andrew. However as Peter follows the truth is revealed and he begins to understand and to know. In chapter 6 of John’s gospel after many of Jesus disciples has deserted him because of his confronting and difficult teaching he turns to those who are left and says, “and you—would you also like to leave?”

Peter answers, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We now believe and know you are the Holy One who has come from God”. It is in following Jesus that who Jesus is is fully revealed.

We can hear and read a lot of words about Jesus. We can even say a lot of words about him but that does not compare to answering his invitation to “Come and see” and spend time with him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that the fundamental question was not, was Jesus the Son of God or any other lofty title we can think of but who was Jesus for each and every one of us. It is the question we ask about a real person and a real relationship. The only way we can ever know the

answer to that question is by taking the risk of getting close enough to find out.

We have to put our books aside, turn off the Radio National Religion program, switch off Compass, take any thing a preacher says with a grain of salt and get close to Jesus. When he says, “Come” that is exactly what we must do. It is only when we come to Jesus that all our questions about him can truly begin to be answered. I find it intriguing and revealing that the first words of Jesus in this gospel, the gospel with the most theological language, the most abstract ideas about Jesus, are about invitation into a relationship. Have you ever come to Jesus?

I probably sound like an evangelical preacher when I ask that question but it is a question worth asking. How often do we open our heart and hear the call of Jesus to “Come” and then actually do it? How often do we simply spend a day with Jesus? Half a day? What about an hour? Twenty minutes any one?

If we are listening the whisper of Jesus comes at the most unexpected times. We hear the word “come” and we are drawn immediately. In the word “Come” is promise and hope and we know they are true. Oswald Chambers writes, “Personal contact with Jesus alters everything. Be stupid enough to come and commit yourself to what he says”. That is of course what Andrew did and then Simon and Philip and Nathaniel, the Samaritan woman and Mary and Martha and all the rest. They came and found in being with him, being close to him, something intriguing, fascinating and wondrous. They answered the invitation to come and see and their lives were irrevocably changed. That’s the rub isn’t it?

It is a whole lot safer to stay with what other people write and say about Jesus rather than finding out for ourselves. Getting close to him might actually mean we have to change, or do something different, or let go of some ideas or habits. It might mean we have to live in a radically different way. And for some of us any change is too much change.

Many of us love the verse, “Come unto me and I will give you rest” but deep down we know that if we truly come and follow then it will mean transformation. There will be change. It actually means getting out of bed, out of languor and exhaustion, out of the state of being half dead while we are still alive. It means being filled with the Spirit of life and being upheld by the Spirit of Christ.

But we can choose. We can safely read the books, do the degrees, listen to the radio. We can see Jesus walking by and simply admire the fact that he does. We can discuss why he does and hear other people say, “There goes Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, the Lamb of God, the Rabbi, the Son of God”.

We can observe and talk and chatter. We can even take on some of these ideas we hear and try and be better people, more loving and neighborly and we will probably enjoy ourselves in the process and perhaps even do some good.

Or we can get close to Jesus. Now that’s a journey that will take us to a whole other place.