

## Second Sunday after Epiphany

This is a local shop for local people there's nothing for you here! So says Tubbs and Edward in Royston Vasey's local shop. Those of you who know the League of Gentlemen will know what I am on about! I read some commentary recently that the self-deprecating humour of the British, parodying their way of life, has become a rather warped reality. The article was written in the light of Brexit and the sense that Britain was indeed becoming a local place for local people; we, of course, are not immune here. Fear always seems to lurk close by in these matters and whilst it is right that terrorism is just that, terrifying, sometimes what has been said and written is quite irrational. We need perhaps to recall the words of John in his first letter: There is no fear in love. Love is intimately linked with freedom and of course freedom is linked with truth, John again... 'The truth will make you free.' Love, truth, freedom. The problem is we appear to have entered the era of Post-truth and the awful logic of that is 'Post-love.'

It is very sad thing that the Oxford Dictionary have declared 'Post-truth' to be their word of the year. Their definition is: 'Where objective facts are less influential in shaping public policy than appeals to emotion and personal belief.' One philosopher warns of the corruption of 'intellectual integrity' and damage to 'the whole fabric of democracy.' But what of us, we are criticised as being an organisation which appeals to emotion and personal belief? There are many who would claim that we religious folk are part of the problem because apparently we ignore objective facts, we lack intellectual integrity.

Today in our Gospel reading we meet the Johannine Jesus, he is portrayed differently to the Matthean Jesus that we met last week. He was a Jewish man who saw his ministry broadened and universalised as he went from the 'lost sheep of the House of Israel' to the 'nations,' lifting the burden of the law and preaching the righteousness of God as gift. The folk who first heard about the Johannine Jesus were experiencing the next phase, understandably they found themselves at odds with their Jewish neighbours who were seeing their ancient traditions and rituals given a new interpretation by Jesus; John's community went to great lengths to explain exactly who this person is and why he had the authority to re envision the Judaism of his day; in doing so they made these bold and theologically adventurous claims about him. John the Baptist heaps title on title, attribution upon attribution on Jesus: he is the Lamb of God, the one who was before me, the one on whom the Spirit rests, the Son of God. He leaves us in no doubt, the Johannine community want no doubt as to the identity of this man. But importantly it is the response of Jesus that counts and John has Jesus responding in a very particular way, it is little wonder there was doubt, Jesus' response to those around him is clearly not what was expected.

Just as last week we heard the first words of Jesus in the Matthean account, this week we hear Jesus' first words in John. 'What are you looking for,' or 'what are you seeking?' Now today if that were asked of us perhaps we would say 'the

meaning of life,' or 'why is there evil in the world,' we would all have a different response. The disciples respond rather enigmatically by asking him 'where are you staying.' It is an important response, these former disciples of John don't want to know the answers to questions, they want to be with Jesus and to *know him*, to know Jesus *is* to have these answers. I think this is why I feel drawn theologically to the Orthodox Church because of their emphasis on the person of Jesus; get that right and every else makes sense. Jesus of course responds with those famous words 'Come and see.'

These words are so familiar to us that maybe we barely think about them, but they are important; they are Johannine equivalent to 'Follow me.' The order of the words are important because when we think about following, about discipleship there is perhaps a sense in which we must believe in Jesus and know who he is *before* we can follow. These words of Jesus remind us that we *can* follow even with our questions, our doubts; and if we follow, we *will* more truly and fully believe and understand who he is.

This 'Come and see' also takes on the quality of a promise when we understand the Jesus of John's gospel. The story par excellence is the story of the blind man in John chapter 9 who is healed by Jesus but only truly 'sees' when he understands who Jesus really is. He moves from rather tentatively claiming Jesus is a prophet to following Jesus with the words 'Lord, I believe.' This is the promise that lies behind 'Come and see,' by following me you will truly see. See, abide, know, truth these are words that appear regularly in John's account, 'Come and see', 'abide in me, as I abide in you,' 'I know my own and my own know me,', 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' – a statement juxtaposed by Pilate's - 'What is truth?'

There are a number of problems with post truth; one of them is the issue of relativism, we have lost sight of the idea of objective truth, let alone post truth. Pilate's words ring through the centuries to our own time. But also I think we have also become reticent, almost embarrassed to speak about *the* truth. Perhaps because we live among people of diverse views in a pluralist, multi-cultural society we think that speaking of Jesus as *the* truth *and* plurality of thought are mutually exclusive ideas. But I think that we can live in this multi-cultural community of ours *and* say that in Jesus we find truth, if we go about it in *his* way, the way demonstrated in this passage we have explored.

Jesus' first words are the question put to every single one of us, irrespective of faith, culture, colour, nationality or creed. What are you looking for? He invites us to 'Come and see.' Nothing is imposed, nothing demanded, we are not being asked to leave our brains, our intellect at the door, our emotions are not been appealed to, it is pure invitation... 'Come and see.' There is, naturally a challenge for those of us live with this motto; those seekers who are questioning, those who are encouraged by our motto, what will they find? It is my hope that in this rather cynical age they will find a group of folk who in all humility are seeking the truth and doing so with conviction and gratitude and confidence...and want to join them.