

Last Sunday, the first Sunday after Epiphany, our Lessons were grouped under the heading of ‘The Baptism of Jesus’. We have left behind the stable, the child in the manger, the shepherds, the wise men, Joseph and Mary. We have leapt forward some thirty years or so. Last Sunday we heard of the Baptism of Jesus by John in the river Jordan.

Speaking of our own baptism, the Pastoral Introduction to the Service of Baptism in our Prayer Book begins:

‘Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love’

The beginning of a journey for us with God and into God which continues for the rest of our lives.

This morning I want to reflect on journeys, the beginnings of journeys for Jesus himself, for the disciples, for us. For Jesus, his Baptism by John the Baptist marked the beginning of his public ministry, the beginning of a journey from the Jordan, through Galilee and ultimately to Jerusalem, the drama of conflict, of trial, of Cross and Resurrection.

As he set out on that journey, he called others to follow him. In our Gospel reading we heard John's account of the beginning of that process. It begins with the Baptist pointing his two of his disciples to Jesus. We are simply told that they followed Jesus. The word used in the original Greek of the Gospel carries with it the mean of ‘following as a disciple’. There is awkwardness to what follows as Jesus asks them ‘What are you looking for?’ Well, what are they looking for? At that point they don't know and so they just ask ‘Where

are you staying?’ The response is the invitation ‘Come and see.’ As I’ve said before, the Greek in which the Gospel is written has a number of words that we translate as the single English word ‘see’. There is the casual, ‘I see’, as ‘I see the cat on the wall’. Then there is ‘I see’ as I notice. And finally I see, I understand, I see this is significant. It is this last word that is used in Jesus’ words of invitation in the Gospel ‘Come and see.’

Going back to the start of this, their following, their discipleship begins before they have any personal knowledge or experience of Jesus – there is little more than an instinctive response to the prompting of John. But there is something about Jesus that draws them in, to discover more, to get a deeper understanding of him and his message. And so they accept the invitation, they go to see where he is staying and they spend the day with him. We know nothing of what was said, nothing of what was done but whatever it was, Andrew just has to go and find his brother Simon and tell him all about it. ‘We have found the Messiah.’ It all sounds so definite but as we shall realise as we follow the subsequent story, they didn’t fully understand what Jesus was all about. But they knew enough that they wanted to share it, wanted to share this journey of discovery with others.

We have that lovely meeting of Simon with Jesus: “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter). Simon didn’t know what his brother Andrew’s strange new friend was talking about, but there was something, something he could not put his finger on, that kept him there. And, as I often say, the rest of his life, the rest of his journey, was a process of the Simon he was becoming the Peter Jesus called him to be.

As I look back on the start of my own haphazard spiritual journey, I find myself facing that same question Jesus asked of those two men, ‘What are you looking for?’ I certainly didn’t know then. I’ve recalled my physics master, fabulous teacher, delightfully eccentric, deeply devout, having just expounded on the incredible order of the created universe, demanding of his sceptical 6th form ‘A’ Level class – ‘Don’t tell me its all an accident’.

That was the beginning of my journey. I remember being moved to pray not knowing who or what I was praying to. I recall going to Church, not having much of a clue as to what was going on but deeply impressed by the people who gathered there so much so that I felt I wanted to go back to be a part of whatever was going on there. Understanding of doctrine, knowledge of Bible came later along the line. These random thoughts came together as I read our Gospel passage and a passage in a book I’m reading at the moment.

God likes us so much that he has, over time, made available to us in our midst a way to disentangle us from the mess we inhabit, before we even knew it was a mess, and instead has invited us to share with God, at the same level as ourselves, in making something entirely different, together.

James Alison ‘Undergoing God’ p34

Jesus coming to disentangle us from the mess we inhabit, before we even knew it was a mess, inviting us to share with him in making something entirely different together.

Jesus called those early disciples as they were in all their humanity, in all their strengths and weaknesses, and worked in and through this most unlikely

collection of men and women bringing the Gospel to the far corners of the then known world.

I often reflect on the text the Bishop of Aston took for his sermon at my own Confirmation, just before I came away to College.

¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. *John 15:16*

We are chosen not because we are especially virtuous, especially talented, especially anything – we are chosen, called to be saints, as we are in all our strengths, our weaknesses, our talents and our failures. And worship, in its broadest sense, is about offering our whole selves to God – our talents, our laughter and our love, our failure and our brokenness. The God we worship, the God who has called us and to whom we seek to respond, he will take us and use us to be his instruments wherever he has placed us – in the streets and the homes, the schools and the business, the shops, the pubs, the clubs, the meetings, the casual conversations, places where people are hurting, where people are being ignored.

This is the vocation, the calling of the Church as individuals and as a community in our country at this time.

¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I
appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last,
John 15:16

As we continue on our journey of faith, may we be faithful to his call, may we in our own individual and community life bear a rich harvest of love, of integrity, of justice and peace, that his Kingdom may be upheld, his Kingdom advanced in this time and place in which we find ourselves..