

Over the past **few weeks we** have been looking at the first chapter of John's gospel. The first 18 verses are the prologue and they tell us that another name for Jesus is the Word, and that he came to earth from heaven to make it possible for us to be saved from sin, and have the right to become God's children.

The next verses speak about John the Baptist and they show us that he knew that someone more important than his was coming and he identified that person as Jesus. In fact, in verse 31 he says the whole reason he came was to reveal Jesus to Israel.

In our reading today we saw another occasion where John reveals Jesus. John was a prophet and teacher and he had his own disciples but look what **happens in** vs 35-37 ³⁵ *The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.* ³⁶ *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'*

³⁷ *When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.*

In the reading Jesus gains five of His original **twelve disciples**:

(1) Andrew

(2) An unnamed disciple (probably John – possibly why there is a reference to the time)

(3) Simon Peter (Andrew's brother)

(4) Philip

(5) Nathanael (perhaps also known as Bartholomew; Bartholomew is linked with Philip in the other three Gospels – Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14)

There was a learning process going on. John's two disciples went after Jesus and when he **asked them**, "What do you want?" their answer seems a bit odd to us. They had been told he was the Lamb of God who would deal with sin, and that he was greater than John. There had been no prophets for 400 years and all of a sudden John

appears – then he says someone more important is coming and John identifies that person as Jesus. Why didn't they ask Jesus what John meant by calling him Lamb of God? Or why John thought he was less important? Why did they ask where he was staying?

I think they were asking if they could become his disciples. You see, in those days a person would find a teacher and spend as much time as possible with them so they could learn from them. Often that included hanging around the house waiting for the teacher to teach. These learners were called disciples.

They went with Jesus and ended up spending the day. Something happened, because after that encounter the first thing he did was to find his brother Simon. It happens here, and with Philip. John misses out a bit of the story – wouldn't it have been good to know what it was that convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah. The important thing is that they were convinced and there us the real danger that if John had recorded the conversation we would have ended up trying to make it into a formula that would work with everybody.

Andrew is convinced and that's all we need to know. He goes and tells Simon that he has found the Messiah – the person who was the fulfilment of prophecy for whom the Jews had been waiting for centuries.

Other than in lists of the disciples we only hear of Andrew trying to introduce people to Jesus

John 6:8-9 ⁸ *Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up,* ⁹ *'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'*

John 12:20-22 ²⁰ *Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.* ²¹ *They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.'* ²² *Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.*

For Andrew it seems that the answer to most questions was to take people to Jesus!

These disciples didn't have all the answers, in fact, what we see in this chapter is a steady revelation of information about Jesus.

Jesus is the Word

- *In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God... So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.* John 1:1 – 2 and 14

Jesus is the Lamb of God

- *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* John 1:29 (Repeated in 1:35-36)

Jesus in the Messiah

- *Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, had heard what John said and then followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah (which means the Christ)." John 1:40-41*

Jesus is the One Spoken of by the Prophets

- *Philip went off to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth." John 1:45*

Jesus is the Son of God

- *And Nathanael replied, "Teacher, you are the Son of God – the King of Israel!" John 1:49*

Do you see how the identity of Jesus unfolded to those who followed him? He was the Word of God; the Son of God; the Lamb of God; the Messiah; the one spoken of by the prophets; Jesus; and King of Israel.

John 1:41 ⁴² *And he brought him to Jesus.* How simple is that.

We are not told how Simon reacted when he met Jesus but we are told that Jesus saw something in Simon and he gave him a new name. In Jewish culture naming is a significant event. Names unveil something of the character of the person, and renaming indicates something of the authority of one person over another. Peter is anything but a rock in the Gospels; he is impulsive and unstable, prone to violence and aggression.

Jesus accepted Simon as he was but promised that he would become ‘a rock’. Jesus named Peter not for what he was but for what, by God’s grace, he would become.

Jesus had come from Galilee to be baptised by John and he now decides to go back there and he finds Philip. Jesus asks Philip to follow him and he does. Again, Philip is changed by meeting Jesus and he goes and finds his friend Nathanael.

This time it is not so straightforward because he is met with a question – Can anything good come from Nazareth? Philip wasn’t put off and simply said that Nathanael should come and see for himself.

And as they approached, Jesus said, “Here comes an honest man – a true son of Israel.” “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. And Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.” And Nathanael replied, “Teacher, you are the Son of God

Jesus described Nathanael as an Israelite without guile or deceit. By that he meant Nathanael was Nathanael. There were no layers to Nathanael. He was who he was. He was forthright and plain spoken. You always knew where you stood with Nathanael.

Nathanael was a skeptic and he made no attempt to hide his skepticism. So Jesus related to him on a level that spoke to his skepticism. When

Jesus knew him and spoke of having seen him sitting under a fig tree engaged in conversation with Phillip, though he was not present or privy to the conversation, Nathanael was immediately impressed. Jesus was the real deal.

If you were one of Jesus' first followers, it would be difficult to be more obscure or lesser known than Nathanael. He is mentioned in John 1 where Jesus first met him and he is mentioned among the disciples who went fishing with Peter in John 21.

The story tells us that several of the disciples were there – **John 21:2-3** *Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ 'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

Was Nathanael a spellbinding, parable teaching, story teller? Was Nathanael a great healer of the sick and caster out of demons? Was Nathanael an impetuous and outgoing Peter? Was Nathanael the disciple that Jesus thought of as his closest friend? No... he was none of those things. But what he knew is that Jesus was the Son of God, a great teacher and someone worth following. And, he was a devoted follower of Jesus. He listened, he learned, and he obeyed the teaching of Christ.

Today Jesus still asks people to 'Come and see'.

- Disciples of Jesus follow His **TEACHING** John 8:31 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.*
- Disciples of Jesus follow His **EXAMPLE** 1 Peter 2:21 *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

Discipleship is not a one-time decision; it's a lifelong JOURNEY.

The reason most of us don't tell people about Jesus is FEAR – we may dress it up differently and try to give it another name but the root

is fear. It may be that we don't actually know Jesus ourselves and so we don't know how to introduce people to him. It may be that we think we don't know enough and will get caught out if someone asks us a question. It may be that we think we're a really bad example of what a Christian should be so we don't want to suggest people spend time with us learning about Jesus.

Our reading today shows us that we don't need to have all the answers – imagine not having an answer to a question! It also shows us that things happen when people are introduced to Jesus. A 2008 survey in America showed that 86% of church members had been invited by someone they knew and that friendship was important in making them stay. But only 2% said they would ever ask someone to come to church with them. There is a real irony in us worrying that the church is dying while at the same time never inviting people to come.

We need to spend time with Jesus – that's what made the difference with the Andrew, John, Philip and Nathanael and it will make a difference in us. **You do that** by reading and praying. That's one of the reasons we're working through John – it is good to learn who Jesus is and what he taught and did – and still does. If you want to learn a bit more about how to pray we have a course coming up after the holidays that you could sign up for.

If you are worried about talking to people, why not invite them to come with you to our **Alpha course** where they can ask their questions – but someone else needs to try and answer them.

You see, when we meet Jesus he sees the potential in us – just like Simon: you are, you will be. Jesus changes us, and it's always for the better.