

20150118Epiphany2

What we have just heard in the Gospel, tell us how Christianity works. The Christian faith is passed from person to person. That's how it originally started, not with the disciples, but with Jesus. That's how it was and how it has been for 2,000-plus years. This week a statement was issued by the two Church of England Archbishops – that of York and Canterbury saying more or less this very thing. They said that the good old Anglican Church cannot continue, in England certainly, if it doesn't change. Now change is threatening, doing things the same old way is re-assuring, comforting. I suppose with my 65th birthday coming up on Tuesday one could say that I'm the first to want something unchanging and comfortable but I also want to see the Anglican Church that I love last longer than my life time. So how can we have "both-and" and not "either-or"?

I suppose we need to explore what was it about Jesus that caused people to believe in him and follow him with no proof that he was the one to follow, that he was the Messiah? We don't know caused this. When we watch movies, we often find the soundtrack music tells us something dramatic is about to happen. But in real life, there was no boom-boom-boom or even soft violins before Jesus spoke. Jesus didn't need background music to impress people. There was just something about him that drew people to him.

Today's Gospel... Had Philip and Nathanael known him before? Had Philip heard about him from Andrew and Peter, since they all lived in the same town? Well, our text doesn't say. It only says that Philip followed Jesus straightaway, then he **told** Nathanael that "we" had found the one promised in the Old Testament. Who were the "we" Philip spoke of? Were there other people who were following Jesus? We just don't know the answer to these questions.

Then Nathanael expressed scepticism about anything good coming out of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, and Philip simply says, "Come and see for yourself." When Jesus tells Nathanael that he had seen him already Nathanael is so impressed that he impetuously calls him the "Son of God" and the "King of Israel."

So, what was there about Jesus to have this kind of effect on people? Elsewhere in the New Testament there are a few slight hints. In all four Gospels it tells us that Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

Without doubt there was something about Jesus that drew people to him. What was it? Biblical scholar today often spend time searching for what they call the "Historical Jesus." By this they mean the actual person Jesus and not a person made to look and sound like the Messiah as the already convinced Gospel writers might convey. In other words, what did Jesus actual say and do and not what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John thought he should say and do. Even in this approach to the gospel we can be struck by the personality of Jesus and how he drew others to himself. So, there must have been something extraordinary about his person that affected those with whom he came into contact. There must have been something magnetic about Jesus' personality to have such an immediate effect on people.

Read all the Gospels and note the profound effect Jesus has when he meets people: the Canaanite woman seeking healing for her daughter, the blind man at Bethsaida in Mark 8, the Roman centurion seeking healing for his man servant in Luke, the woman at the Pharisee's home willing to wash Jesus' feet and dry them with her hair, Zacchaeus climbing a tree to see Jesus and being asked by him to host him for a meal, the Samaritan woman at the well in John, the sick man at the Bethesda pool, the thief crucified next to Jesus, and the centurion at the foot of the cross who could say, "Truly this was the son of God -- to name only a few.

You see, people meet Jesus, and they are changed. Whatever their deepest need was, Jesus meets it. Then what happens? **They tell others what about it.**

And that's how it has worked ever since. One person says to another, "I follow Jesus and invite you to do so too." Now you might say that you were born into a Christian family so no one told you about Jesus. But they did. Parents bring their infant children to Jesus in baptism and then bring them up to follow him. They are told you about Jesus and hopefully you told your children about him too. It's always person-to-person.

Look at the church grow in the Book of Acts. An Ethiopian eunuch is puzzled by a passage in the Old Testament, and Philip "**proclaimed** to him the good news about Jesus". Peter went to the household of the Roman centurion Cornelius and **told** them about Jesus, and "while Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who **heard** the word". This was the breakthrough of the Christian faith to the Gentile world.

The spread of the Christian church across the world is the person-to-person story of the thousands of people who fanned out across the globe to tell the story about Jesus and what Jesus had done for them.

People become Christians because they have seen what the Christian faith has done for those whom they know. The saying passed down from the early years of the church still rings true: "See those Christians, how they love one another."

Can you become a Christian by reading a book about it? Now being a head person and not a heart person, this sounds very appealing to me. Well, yes, I suppose you can but think about it... that too is person-to-person, merely through the medium of the printed page.

If we look at the Old Testament lesson we will find that telling about God is also person to person but in our lesson with slight a twist. The boy Samuel was "ministering to the Lord" under the priest Eli, probably the equivalent of an altar boy. God called him, "Samuel, Samuel," and the boy naturally assumed it was Eli. When it happened again, Eli realized it was God calling and instructed the boy to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." When Samuel heard God's call the third time he responded as Eli had instructed, and God told him what message to deliver to Eli.

So, the pattern in the story is still person-to-person, this time God to Samuel, with Eli as the middleman so to speak, with Samuel then delivering God's message back to Eli in verse 11-20.

Our task as Christians is not to "**prove**" the truth of the Christian faith, although many scholars have written persuasively of the truth of Christianity. Our task is not even **to persuade** others to become Christian. Our task is to say, "Come and see." Philip could have given Nathanael some of his own viewpoint on the situation. He could have said, "This Jesus knows a lot about the Bible." Or he might have said, "There is something about this man Jesus that draws me to him." Even when Nathanael expressed scepticism about "anything good coming out of Nazareth," Philip might have listed some successful people from Nazareth. But no: Philip simply said, "**Come and see**," as if to say, "You don't need me to advertise for Jesus; come and see for yourself." Nathaniel came and saw for himself.

That now becomes our task, to tell people, "Come and see." Come and see what Jesus has done and is doing for you! You can't think of anything? Well, perhaps that is your homework for this week. Spend time re-looking at your life listing what Jesus has done for you so far. Next week is our patronal festival with only one service followed by a breakfast. Come and share with others from this parish what Jesus has done for you as you partake of lovely fresh fruit and tasty muffins. Say to your neighbour, "Come and See!" Then there might be change in our parish, change which is not either-or but both-and. Come and see.