

Genesis 28:10-21, John 1:35-43-end

John's Gospel is quite different from the other three Gospels. It was written by John when he was an old man. The other three Gospels had already been written and were in circulation. He did not need to repeat what they had written.

Though he was an eye witness of Jesus' life and ministry he did not try to write everything he knew. He selected seven miracles or signs and seven significant conversations in order to help us to get to know who Jesus is. His aim is that we can have life in His name [John 20:30-31]

Today's Gospel reading shows us details of the beginning of the early church that the other Gospels don't tell us.

When Jesus came to be baptised in the River Jordan the Lord God showed J-B that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

After Jesus' Baptism and anointing with the Holy Spirit Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He spent time sorting out what kind of king he was going to be. Matthew [4:1-11]

and Luke [4:1-13] describe the temptations that Jesus faced during those 40 days. Jesus refused to accept Satan's alternative methods of materialism, populism and brute force.

Jesus knew that God's way to become King was through the power of self-giving love. By choosing to take the way of the Cross Jesus revealed God's glory and showed what God is really like.

John the Baptist had already attracted a group of men who after being Baptised stayed with him to help him and to learn more. There was a group of friends around J-B united in their desire see God's Kingdom come. When Jesus returned to the area where J-B and his disciples were. J-B looked at Jesus as he walked by and said to his disciples, **"Behold the Lamb of God"**.

The two disciples who were standing with J-B when he pointed Jesus out to them, followed Jesus v37. When Jesus asked them; "What do you want?" they probably didn't know how to express what they wanted so they asked, **"Where are you staying?"** and Jesus invited them to go with Him. **"Come and you will See"**

When people first come to church they don't always know what they are looking for. What Jesus invites them to enjoy is a personal encounter/relationship with Him. "Come and you will see."

They went with Jesus and that was the start for them of a progressive, growing experience of following Him. That is the way many of us have come to faith and begun to follow our Lord Jesus.

Of the two disciples John's Gospel only mentions Andrew by name. The John who wrote John's Gospel is often discrete about his own role. He is most probably the disciple who isn't named in the story. That is how we have this detailed account of what happened.

The other disciple was Andrew. We don't know what they talked about as they walked along but Andrew became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah as J-B had said. He went to find and bring his brother Simon to Jesus. Jesus gave him a new name - Peter.

They had come down to the Jordan and stayed with J-B because they hoped that God's promises of a coming Saviour were being fulfilled. They wanted to be part of that to be where the action was.

Isn't this the same thing that fires us in our service for God. We are called into fellowship with the one who has the words of eternal life. It is because our faith, our life with God, is so precious to us that we want to share it with others.

Andrew and John followed Jesus because of J-B's witness. Philip needed to be invited. Jesus found him & said, "Follow me." Philip, Andrew, Peter, John and James all came from the town of Bethsaida. They had grown up together. They already knew each other. They introduced their family and friends to Jesus. This is what happens throughout the Gospels; Parents bring their children to Jesus Four friends carry their paralysed friend to Jesus.

Philip went off and found Nathanael. Nathanael needed convincing. Many of those we pray for also need convincing. Nathaniel came from Cana in Galilee a little town on the other side of the hill from Nazareth. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" he quipped. Was it local rivalry? He sounds snobbish and sceptical about Nazareth.

Philip doesn't argue with Him. "Come and see for yourself." You can't argue people into the Kingdom. It has to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is this curiously enigmatic conversation when Nathanael approaches Jesus.

Jesus greets Nathanael with the words, **"A true Israelite in whom there is nothing false."** Is Jesus using flattery? It seems an odd thing to say to someone you haven't met yet.

Sceptical Nathanael asks, **"How do you know me?"** Was he thinking, "what has Philip been saying about me?"

But Jesus has not been listening to Philip. He has had insight into what has been going on with Nathaniel while he was far away under a fig tree. Jesus seems to have access supernatural knowledge of what is going on in people's lives.

**"I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."**

Something very significant had taken place in that exchange for which we are given no explanation. But Nathanael's scepticism was wiped out. He is instantly convinced now that what Philip had told him about Jesus was true.

Nathaniel said, **"Rabbi you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."**

The Holy Spirit must have been at work in Nathaniel under that fig-tree.

**To be a true Israelite was to be a true believer.** Had Nathaniel been having a similar experience to that which Jacob had at Bethel? Jacob was a real trickster and deceiver. He was running away from his family in disgrace. He was afraid of his brother's revenge.

Jacob's dream of the angels going up and down on a stairway ladder. He met with the God of His father Isaac and grandfather Abraham in that place and he called it Bethel the house of God. God met him and went with him and did bless him as He had promised.

It was when Jacob returned to the Promised Land, that God met him again and changed his name to Israel.

Jesus assured His new followers, **"If you follow me, you will see What it is like when heaven and earth are open to each other"** In Jesus the glory of heaven has come down to earth visibly in One who is himself a man.

Those early followers of Jesus came to him and found that wherever Jesus was became the place where people could meet with God.

The situation of those early disciples was quite different from that which we face. They were in a time and place where people were longing for the Lord our God to step in and send a saviour. J-B God's prophet warned them and the people flocked to repent and be baptised.

Jesus came and touched and healed people and taught them about the Kingdom of Heaven Himself. The Disciples lived and learned from him for three years.

Most of us don't find it easy to share our faith with those around us within a humanist culture that thinks it has grown up and doesn't need God. But I have found that even in Western Europe through quiet witness there is a steady stream of people coming to faith.

The Alpha Course is a great way for people to "Come and See". Pray for those who join the course. Let the Holy Spirit and the Course do the convincing. Recommend your friends and do the course with them. The Gospel of Jesus is still the way to the life with God that will satisfy our deepest needs.

## PRAYER

Father God, we thank you for the call of Jesus on our lives to come and follow Him. May we see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly day by day. Amen