

# Come and See ...

## *... the calling of the first disciples*

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*A sermon given on the Second Sunday of Epiphany, 15th January 2023 – by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in Beverley Minster*

*John 1:29-42*

So, on the opening morning of the Christmas Tree Festival here at Beverley Minster (which for those of you who don't know, is an amazing occasion when we fill the Minster all around with 120 Christmas trees and people come and walk round and explore them all - they're all created by the community), I came down to see if everybody was okay and what was happening, and I walked through the doors and I was greeted by a nameless church warden who said, "Wendy, the new bishop is in here. She went that way and she's wearing a yellow coat." Well, this was most exciting because you don't find a new bishop hiding amongst trees very often. And so I grabbed Ben, "I said, Ben, Ben, let's go and see the new bishop." And so we scooted our way around, hunting for the yellow coat and for Bishop Eleanor. And we rounded the corner and there she was. And so I had bishop Eleanor. Bishop Eleanor. And she turned around and thankfully gave me a hug. And it turns out that it was her mum's first visit since Eleanor had returned to this part of the world from New Zealand. And she decided on her first day off with her mum to bring her to see Beverley Minster. Now, hilariously, they hadn't realised there was a tree festival on and they hadn't realised there was a paying entrance, so they just snuck in the back and started wandering around happily. But just cut that off the recording, Libby. And we won't tell her, but we were very, very excited to see her. And the fact that there was a bishop in our midst, a new one at that, was just incredibly exciting.

And I tell you that story partly because I think it's a really fun one, and partly because actually, that's the heart of the themes running through this Epiphany season. The idea that news spreads, in this case, good news, but really all news spreads quite fast. And there are always those who are seeking and then finding. We heard about the Magi last week as we travelled around the Minster in our procession, seeking and finding the newborn Christ. And there are always those like our wonderful church warden, who are pointing others to find and do the same, just like the star led the Magi. And John the Baptist, as we heard this morning. And, of course, the big theme of Epiphany is that the good news of Jesus is for everyone in the whole world. We didn't announce the bishop's arrival to everybody in the building because it was her day off, but it would have spread further had she been here on an official visit and everybody would have wanted to come.

So, in our reading this morning, we have a number of characters who were all in the middle of this Epiphany theme. First, we've got John the Baptist and John the Baptist's role as we've explored often before, was to gather disciples, not ultimately to follow him, although they did, but to prepare them for the coming of Jesus. He baptised them in the River Jordan with the water of repentance. As we do at the beginning of the service, we prepare ourselves to meet again afresh with the presence of God. John was baptising people ready to meet with the presence of Jesus. And of course, Jesus is one of the people he baptised. And John here is passing on the news, *"Jesus got baptised and I saw it and I saw what happened. The spirit descended on him like a dove and I heard God speak and God said, this is the Son of God."*

The idea of revealing Jesus being revealed by the Father, and John pointing others to that truth, to that news that he'd heard and seen and experienced. So John tells his disciples and his followers the news, what he's seen, what he's heard of. And one day, whilst he's out walking with two of his followers, he spots Jesus. And he shouts out, *"Look, here is the lamb of God."*

John's followers would have automatically understood the reference to the Passover Lamb, the sacrifice made to save God's people, the blood put on the doors to protect them from the angel of death. To call somebody the Lamb of God invoked huge amounts of significance. And John's followers were spiritual seekers. Like the Magi, they're looking for answers, for truth. They have religious backgrounds, but they've gone out into the desert, they've been following John, they have questions and they want answers. They respond to John's commendation of Jesus and they head off to talk to him. I'm imagining it almost quite comically, where they're loyally following John and then they u-turn and head off to find Jesus.

And then we have Jesus right at the start of his ministry. He has very rapidly gone from being the newborn baby we find in the manger to being a fully grown adult. But he's now looking for followers, for disciples, for people who will join his ministry, who will learn his teachings and follow him as a rabbi. And of course, the rabbi's method of teaching is to say, 'Come live with me, learn from my life and my actions. Try and become like me because you see what I do, pass my message on.'

And so we heard this morning of that critical moment when some of the disciples who were looking for a Messiah, met the Messiah who was looking for disciples. And here they meet. Andrew hears what Jesus has to say. I'd love to know what that was, but whatever it was, it makes him rush off and fetch his brother Simon, just as I raced off to fetch Ben. Come

with me. Come and see. Simon then comes to meet Jesus and is given a new name, signifying a moment that will change the course of his life forever. (The third disciple, the one who had been with Andrew, never actually gets named. And there are many debates that I won't go into now as to who it would be, but people often think that it is in fact John, the writer of the Gospel.)

At the heart of the reading is that eternal phrase 'come and see.' Simple encounters like these. Someone points to Jesus talking about who he is and inviting others to come and see, come and meet this person. Someone else looking for answers and meaning, wondering what life is all about and who can make sense of their big questions. Responding to the invitation, the signposts, the stories. Disciples looking for a messiah - meet the Messiah looking for disciples. This is how Jesus's mission began and of course, how it continued. One beggar telling another where to find bread. And this is why Paul could write in his letter to the Corinthians, *"All those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus."*

And so here we are today, part of the worldwide Church, followers of Jesus who have responded to that invitation to 'come and see' and to have found their lives transformed by an encounter with his love, his truth, his Holy Spirit.

But of course, the invitation never ends. I heard somebody very wise say the other day, "The longer I follow Jesus, the deeper my faith becomes, but the more questions I have." And we want to be a community where people can continue to discover more about Jesus, to 'come and see' to bring their questions without any fear of "Well, you should know this."

Jonathan is running a course on Tuesday evenings in the Peter Harrison room called 'Talking Faith', and he's already got a lovely group of people, but room for more: some who have simply come to 'come and see' and others full of questions. And any of you would be welcome to join them - either just turn up on Tuesday at 7:30pm or do chat to me afterwards if you want to know more. But it's simply that opportunity to continue to say, "I want to know more. I want to learn from others. I want to talk about my questions, my doubts."

And for others here this morning, you may be going through a difficult time and you may feel far from being a disciple of Jesus. And may I encourage you to find someone trusted to talk to or to pray with, to be encouraged by Paul's words that we heard read earlier, that 'God is faithful.' And no matter what we are going through, God calls each of us by name. God invites us all into a new chapter of a story and he will never leave us.

And of course, there are some of us who simply need to keep doing what we've always been doing, which is to point others to Jesus, to invite them to 'come and see' - to share what we know of his love, his truth and his presence with us.

# Reading Text

## John 1:29-42

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' <sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' <sup>32</sup> And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."<sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.' <sup>35</sup> The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' <sup>39</sup> He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup> He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup> He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).