

As far as I can tell I last preached on this passage twenty years ago, give or take 5 days. A lot has happened since a reasonably slim chap in his early thirties with two small sons and quite a lot of hair last spoke about Nathanael and Philip and good things coming from Nazareth. Think back to what life was like for you in 1992, and what you have now that you didn't have then. I'm thinking particularly of the way that our means of communication have changed. Some people had mobile phones which you needed a sherpa to carry for you. Your computer stood alone, and there were disks and they were floppy. Few people beyond computer science departments had the internet and world wide web.

So there is no reference in my last sermon on this topic (which as it happens was written with a 'pen' on 'paper' and placed in a 'Filofax') to the image which first struck me as I looked at John 1 again. John the Baptist speaks about the Messiah. The next day he sees Jesus and says 'Here is the Lamb of God'. The next day two of John's disciples, perhaps encouraged by John, start to follow Jesus. One of them is Andrew, and he rushes to tell his brother, Simon. Immediately Jesus gives him a new name. The next day Jesus ups sticks and goes to Galilee in the north. He finds Philip, who follows him. Philip finds Nathanael, and he follows Jesus too. It's breathless stuff. According to John the Evangelist it's taken three days only for Jesus to be publicly revealed as the Messiah, and to gather followers in the south and the north. And the image I thought of as I read this? That if Jesus was on Twitter he would be said to be 'trending' – one of the most talked about subjects on the internet.

Think of Twitter as the kind of conversation you might overhear and join in with in a bus queue. People will talk about stuff that they think others will like, or might like to hear. Sometimes a subject 'trends', and everyone wants to join in. Twitter is a very young piece of technology, and twenty years ago I couldn't have imagined anything like it or the smartphone which makes it fly. But the concept is ancient. If something is interesting, or amazing, or challenging, or worth listening to, people will talk about it and they will tell other people about it too. You can't help it, even if it's only to pass the time in the paper shop or in a pub or the Post Office. What happens in John 1 is that, from nowhere, Jesus becomes the most important thing there is, and people are so struck by him that they drop everything and follow him.

What happens on Twitter is that, when you come across someone you think is interesting and amusing, you 'follow' them. It means you can decide to read what they write. On Facebook you control who sees what you write. On Twitter other people can decide to watch you. Some people have hundreds of thousands – even millions – of followers. And there's a cartoon circulating of Jesus saying to someone "No, I meant really follow me. Not just on Twitter'. There is no commitment to being a Twitter follower. You're a watcher, not a disciple. What happens to Andrew and Simon and Philip and Nathanael here is that they encounter the living God in the person of Jesus Christ, and they are so blown away that they know that there is no place they would rather be, no person that they would rather be with, than this man Jesus. Nathanael even overcomes his prejudices. 'Goole? Can anything good come from Goole?' But when he sees and hears Jesus, his first words are 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God'. Wow.

It would be fabulous just to be able to walk into a pub, or Costa, or to work, or to the Leisure Centre, and say something about God and for everyone to go 'Yeah' and sign up for an Alpha Course. But not even Jesus got that reaction all the time. What I notice about these encounters is that these are people who are already looking. John the Baptist has been called to prepare the way. Andrew is already following John as his disciple. Nathanael is described as an honest follower of God. Philip and Simon are connected to Andrew, and you can imagine the conversations they must have had. They are ready, and when they recognise Jesus they move in a flash. Not everyone we will speak to, or invite to church, or who brings their children for baptism, or gets married here, or we know at work, is at the stage where an encounter with Christ through us, in powerful words or amazing worship, will actually get through. For many people there's a process to go through, a language to learn. People need to be prepared.

I say this so that we will not be discouraged when we give it our best shot and nothing happens. People's preparation takes different forms, and people go at different speeds. People saw Jesus in the flesh and rejected him, and the same will happen today. But I believe people will be prepared and moved and challenged when they meet people – Christians – who are not Twitter followers, vaguely interested if they have the time, but who are disciples. When Jesus said 'Follow me' to Philip and Nathanael and Andrew and Simon he meant exactly that. You went where your teacher did and you did what he did. People who followed Plato even imitated his stoop when he walked. Jesus calls us today, and if we are ready we will be his followers.

We'll give away a proportion of our money when most other people are trying to hold on to theirs. We'll practice forgiveness rather than getting even. We'll know that we need healing and forgiveness in our very beings and souls, and that God can give this. We'll look out for the underdog rather than following the celebrity. We'll be pleased, rather than jealous, when others succeed. We'll recognise our weaknesses rather than pointing out other people's. We'll see human life as the image of God, not something which can be extinguished on a whim. We will point to Jesus Christ, not ourselves. We will find our worth in the fact that we are loved by God, not in the size of our paypacket or the model of our car. We will find Jesus revealed in other people, and love them because of that, not because they are beautiful or witty or rich. We'll know that we can never get enough of the Bible, never plumb the depths or scale the heights of prayer, never exhaust the praises of God. We will be disciples.

And if we do that, honestly and humbly and openly, then perhaps Jesus will become real to the people we meet, the people we bump into. Perhaps we'll be like a glass full of water which gets bumped and spills out. When people bump us perhaps the love of God will spill out. All we can do is be pottery containers for the most amazing treasure. But if we follow, if we demonstrate that this God has claimed the whole of our life, and if we humbly are unashamed to admit it, then Jesus Christ will be revealed to our husbands and wives and children and families and friends and neighbours and colleagues.

Jesus was noticed in John 1 because he revealed the Father. Jesus will be noticed in HU17 because we reveal Jesus. Not everyone will get it. But shame on us if those who could get it don't get it because we are ashamed. Our job is to follow, to show Jesus to others, and to tell others about him. You can use Twitter for that. You can use words. You can do things. But you cannot be indifferent. 'Rabbi. You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!'