

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1: 35-51

Introduction

One of the things that has pleased me most in the past year is that in nearly all of our churches new people have begun to worship regularly. This means that the churches are doing their job – which is to reach out to people in the community with the Good News of Jesus Christ and to welcome them into their midst.

This is the role of the church as a whole but we have to do that as individuals as well. We need to practice evangelism and bring people we know and live amongst to meet Jesus. One of the things that has encouraged me is that the new people who have come to our services in the last year have first and foremost responded to contact with church members and the relationships they have built with them. Building relationships is the beginning of evangelism but where do we go from there? Well I think this morning's Gospel reading has a great deal to teach us about bringing people to Jesus

In the previous few verses we read how John the Baptist had witnessed to who Jesus was, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". Here, the next day Jesus passes by where John and some of his disciples were and John again points him out and tells them that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Two of his disciples hearing this followed Jesus to find out more about him. They spent time with him and realising that he was the Messiah, the saviour that they had been waiting for, immediately brought other people to meet Jesus as well.

In this passage there are two stories of how believers brought somebody to meet Jesus. We see how they came to believe in Jesus, how their faith budded and then blossomed as they met with Jesus and recognised who he was. It is also interesting to see from this passage how people come to be Christians in very different ways. Andrew and another unnamed disciple, who could have been John himself, followed Jesus because of John the Baptist's preaching. Philip had a personal private encounter with Jesus in which no one else was involved. Simon and Nathaniel were both brought to Jesus by the witness of friends

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or family who not only told them about Jesus but brought them to meet him.

There is no set way to come to faith in Jesus, no formula, God works differently in each of our lives, and yet there are common foundations, certain things that are involved for each of us. We could perhaps call them foundations for faith, which are necessary steps in coming to know and trust Jesus as Lord. These elements are all in the passage and we see them in the way that each of these early converts came to know Christ as their Lord.

1. The first of these is TESTIMONY

John the Baptist saw and recognised Jesus. When he baptised him he saw God's Spirit descend upon Jesus and recognised him as the promised Messiah, he told others what he had seen and proclaimed Jesus for who he was. John's disciples believed what John told them and sought Jesus out to learn more of him. It was the testimony of an eyewitness that helped them to recognise Jesus.

The Gospels are our testimony from the eyewitnesses. The accounts of Jesus' life are written by people who lived with Jesus, who saw what he did and heard what he said, who saw his death and resurrection and who recognised him as saviour. The Old Testament is also testimony to Jesus. It tells us that in the title: 'Testament' - a written testimony. Jesus said, "The scriptures bear witness to me" and the scriptures he was referring to were what we call the Old Testament - the law and the prophets. When Philip found Nathaniel and told him about Jesus he said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote." The scriptures had prepared them for a saviour who would come. They were looking for him and when they heard from those who had seen Jesus for themselves they were ready to believe.

When something exciting happens it is great to be there and to see it and experience it for ourselves, but if we can't the next

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best thing is to hear it from somebody who was there and did see it. When I was living in Leytonstone there was a bank raid at the Nat West bank in the High Street which was directly opposite my own Bank, Barclays. I arrived to pay in a cheque shortly after it had happened and listened with great interest to the people in Barclays who had seen it all and knew exactly what was going on. They had been there, they knew what had happened. I could trust what they were telling me and believe it. In the same way the testimony of the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus, lived with him and loved him can be trusted and believed. More than that they can help us to believe and trust in Jesus ourselves.

The story of Thomas bears this out. After Jesus' death and resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples in the upper room, but Thomas wasn't there and he wouldn't believe what the disciples told him. He said that unless he saw Jesus for himself he would never believe he had risen. Jesus indulged his unbelief, for which incidentally I don't blame Thomas at all, and appeared to him in person so that he could see for himself that Jesus was alive. But in doing so he rebuked him and said, "Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me and have believed." What Jesus was saying was "blessed are those who believed and accepted eyewitness accounts of his resurrection - they should be enough. They are reliable, they can be believed.

The best way to introduce someone to Jesus is to get them to read the eyewitness accounts of who he was and what he did. We can share our own experience of Jesus with them and tell them what he has done for us and that is very important. If people can see that Jesus is alive and active and working in our lives they will want to know more about him and perhaps to meet him for themselves. Personal testimony is extremely important but when we have told them what Jesus means to us we should get them to read for themselves what actually happened. It is worth having a modern version of the Bible or single gospels to give away to friends so that they can read it

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for themselves. – I have a stash at home which I'm happy to give you to give to others.

You may have heard of a book called "Who moved the stone?" It was written by a lawyer called Frank Morrison who had set out to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was an impossibility, but as he read the evidence, the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection he came to believe in Christ as his Lord and Saviour and called the first chapter of his book "the book that was never written". The testimony of those who knew Jesus had convinced him so much that he never wrote a book proving the resurrection hadn't happened. The book he wrote proclaimed Christ's resurrection from the dead and his status as Saviour and Lord. If we want our family and friends to come to know Jesus we cannot do better than getting them to read the Bible.

2. Testimony is the first step but it needs to be followed up by EXPERIENCE

Andrew and his friend heard John the Baptist's testimony to who Jesus was and then followed him and actually met him and spent a day with him to experience for themselves whether or not what John said was true. Jesus saw them following him and asked them, "What do you want?" They replied, "Where do you live?" This is probably not such a silly opening as it might at first appear. They would want to know where they could find him so they could listen to his teaching, but also where we live shows much of who we are. Our homes tell a lot about us and when we meet people in their own environment we learn more about them.

Jesus' response was "Come and see". Come and find out for yourself. After spending a day with Jesus Andrew was convinced that he was the Messiah they had been waiting for, though not understanding fully what that meant. His response was to bring his brother to Jesus so that he too could meet him. Philip came to believe in Jesus when he met him and immediately went and told his friend Nathaniel about him. Nathaniel's response shows inter-village rivalry - "Can

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anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip knew the best way to answer that was "come and see" - come and find out for yourself. Listen to what I have to say but come and find out for yourself.

John Stott tells a story of how years ago he taught on this passage as part of a series of lessons on John's Gospel in the Children's Church they were running at All Soul's, Langham Place. At the end of the term they set an exam paper to find out what the children had learned. Amongst the factual questions they added one that said, "Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, Philip brought Nathaniel, who have you brought? One little girl called Jilly wrote "I brought myself" And she is right. We cannot bring others to Jesus unless we have brought ourselves to him and experienced his love and forgiveness for ourselves.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during the war, said this, "It is futile to say 'go to the cross' we've got to be able to say, 'come to the cross' and there are only two voices that can issue that invitation. One is the voice of the sinless redeemer with which we cannot speak and the other is the voice of the forgiven sinner who knows himself forgiven - and that is our part."

So in coming to faith in Jesus Christ we need the testimony of those who saw and lived with Jesus and we need to experience him, his love and forgiveness for ourselves. But for a life of faith that is not enough. Something else is needed.

Something I have called

3 RADICAL TRANSFORMATION

Our faith needs to be living and growing and changing us. If we base our Christian lives on an experience of Jesus at one point in time and simply look back and remember it we will not grow as Christians. More than that our faith will be empty and will shrivel and eventually die. Our faith in Christ has to be based on an ongoing experience of him and of how he is changing us. There's no point in looking back to good times when we really

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experienced God working in our lives and in our church. We have to be looking to see where he is working now and allow him to use us and work through us in that way.

In the Gospel reading Jesus promises this radical transformation to both Simon and to Nathaniel. He tells them about his ongoing work in their lives and how he is going to change them. To Simon he says, "You are Simon son of John You will be called Peter (which means the rock)" To Nathaniel he said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that. You shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man."

To Peter he promised a radical change of character. In the Bible a person's name described who they were. People's names were very significant and God changed people's names as he worked in their lives. Abram, which means exalted Father, became Abraham, which means Father of nations. This was a result of God's promise to him that he would have many descendants and found nations. Jacob, which means cheat, after struggling with God at Beth-el was called Israel, which means "God strives" to show the way that God was changing the cheat Jacob into Israel the Father of God's people.

In the same way it was significant that Jesus told Simon, "You are Simon, (Simon the impulsive and weak,) but you shall be Peter - the rock". That promise must have been a great help to Simon, especially in the times when he failed and did silly things. Jesus had promised that he would change him into a rock, somebody solid that would be the foundation of his church.

So to Simon Jesus promised a radical change in character and to Nathaniel he promised a radical change in outlook. Jesus said to Nathaniel, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree". Nathaniel, as a Jew would probably have recognised that as a reference to one of the passages in Scripture that looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. It talks about the

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time of the Messiah as a time when each man would sit under his own fig tree and under his own vine. Jesus was telling him that he had seen him and he also described him as "an Israelite in whom there is no guile." Nathaniel told Jesus that he was "The son of God the true king of Israel" He recognised Jesus as Saviour and Lord, but his vision of what that meant was limited. He applied it only to Israel.

Jesus told him that he would have his vision expanded. He would see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending. The barrier would be removed between heaven and earth and it would be Jesus, the Son of Man, who would be the mediator between heaven and earth; the ladder on which angels climb up and down. Nathaniel, the nationalist who was interested in rivalries between villages would have his vision expanded to embrace salvation for the whole earth. So as we come to know and trust Jesus he changes us. He can change reeds into rocks and things that are unseen and not understood into realities in our lives.

So as Christians our faith is aroused by testimony. It is nurtured by experience and is confirmed by a lifetime of transformation. As we come to know and love and trust Jesus we see that he can change reeds into rocks and open the heavens to our gaze.