

**Sunday, 14 January 2017**

**Second Sunday of Epiphany**

**St Andrew's, Cobham**

**1 Samuel 3.1-10; Revelation 5.1-10; John 1.43-end.**

**Come and see**

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Many years ago now I did a BA in English. I loved it but one unfortunate side effect of it was that for a long time I couldn't read a book or even watch a movie without analysing what the underlying theme was and how well the writer or director had conveyed it. Fortunately I've got over that.

But this morning I'd like to go back to those days and invite you to become all analytical and see if you can pick up on the underlying theme or thread in what I am about to say.

So here goes. Don't worry, you won't be tested.

We have recently come to the end of the season of Christmas, when we celebrated God's revelation of Himself to the world in the person of His Son, Jesus, born a helpless baby in a stable. In Luke's gospel, the birth of Jesus is announced by a great host of angels appearing to the shepherds in the fields and in response, the shepherds say, 'Let's go and see this thing that has happened,' (Luke 2.15).

Then, last Sunday we began the season of Epiphany, with Matthew's account of the wise men, the Magi. Epiphany is the season when we celebrate the revelation that Christ is not just for Israel but for the Gentiles too – the non-Jews – you and me – as represented by the wise men who came from an unnamed country in the East. The wise men are told about the birth of Jesus not by angels but by the birth of a new star. Like the shepherds, they too decide to go and see.

And today, although we are still in the season of Epiphany, we have leapt forward about thirty years from Jesus' birth to the start of his ministry in Galilee.

And his ministry begins with John the Baptist baptizing the Lord (Mark 1.9), and then directing the people towards Jesus, with the famous words 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,' (John 1.29).

Jesus now acquires his first disciples. In response to John the Baptist's words, two of his followers start to follow Jesus instead. When Jesus sees them, he says, 'What do you want?', and in reply, they say, 'Rabbi, Teacher, where are you staying?' And Jesus says, 'Come and see.'

I'm pretty sure you must have picked up on the theme by now, as we come to this morning's Gospel reading.

Jesus calls Phillip to be his disciple, and Phillip, full of excitement, immediately goes to find his friend Nathanael to tell him that he had found the one whose coming had been prophesied – Jesus of Nazareth. And when Nathanael expresses disbelief that anything good can come out of Nazareth, Phillip replies... you know what's coming ... 'Come and see.'

Go and look. Come and see.

There is your theme that unites all these different stories.

In Jesus, God seems to be absolutely intent on bringing himself to the attention of the world. The angels announcing his birth; the magi being guided by the star; John the Baptist physically pointing Jesus out as the Lamb of God; Jesus saying to the first disciples, 'Come and see where I am staying,'; and then Phillip, the disciple, going to fetch Nathanael and meeting his objections with the words 'Come and see.'

Go and look. Come and see. Our theme is God prodding and nudging and calling us to look at Jesus.

But we can't stop there. It may be good enough for an English student to figure out the theme of a book or a movie and then slope off to the pub, but for us today, that's not enough. Because whenever we discern something in the Bible we have to take another, critical step – namely, we have to challenge ourselves with what it all means for me? We've had this insight, but now how is that going to affect my life?

What are the implications for us of God's apparent determination to bring attention to Jesus?

Well, I think there are three.

The first is that God is a God who is constantly trying to call us, to get our attention and then draw us to himself. To put it another way, God is missional. He is not a remote, uninterested God who has set the world in motion and then sat back to watch it wind down. He is not some blind force, as in Eastern

religions. He is a god of relationship, who wants us to fulfil our true purpose by being in relationship with him, and for that to happen he initiates contact with himself. He draws us to himself. He is missional.

The second is that he demands a response from us. If someone says to you: here, look at this – you inevitably have to respond. Even ignoring it is a response. So it is when God calls us in Jesus to look at him, to see him. It is such a clear, urgent, real thing invitation to engage with him, that one has to respond, one way or another. One has to make a decision – I have come and I have seen, now what am I going to do about it? Turn away? Pretend I haven't seen? Or respond in worship, like the magi, like John the Baptist, and like Nathanael, that true Israelite – 'You are the Son of God and the King of Israel.'

The third and final implication for us is this. If God himself is missional, then so must we be. John the Baptist pointed away from himself to Jesus - Behold the Lamb of God.' Phillip's first action after becoming a follower of Jesus was to fetch Nathanael and say, 'Come and see.'

I know this idea can make many people uncomfortable. But it doesn't mean knocking on doors or collaring people on the pavement, unless of course, you feel God is calling you to do that. Neither does it mean trying to win philosophical arguments, trying to prove to other people that they are wrong. It is not we who bring people to Christ, it is God. All we need to do is to invite people to 'come and see'. Why not try it? Why not take a bit of a risk and say to a friend or a family member 'Would you like to come to church with me next Sunday?' That's all Phillip had to do with Nathanael, and Jesus did the rest.

Amen.