

Sunday 17th January, 2021
Calling the First Disciples

Readings for today:

1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20)

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

The second Sunday after Epiphany traditionally tells the story of how Jesus called his first disciples, and each year the story is from a different gospel. The three synoptic gospels, (Mark, Luke and Matthew) basically tell the story from the same point of view – Jesus calls the four fishermen, Andrew, Simon, James and John from their nets. John tells a different story.

In the verses before today's reading (John 1:35-42), John tells the story of Andrew, who started out being a disciple of John the Baptist. John points him and another disciple who is probably John, the writer of the gospel, to Jesus and they become followers of Jesus. Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus (vv41,42). I suspect this is not a different version of their calling but just another part of the story.

Today's reading tells of two more disciples: Philip and Nathanael. Philip and Simon lived in the same town, Bethsaida. Is it not then possible that they had both heard Jesus preaching, and had been drawn to him? Philip tells Nathanael that they have found the awaited Messiah: Nathanael is sceptical – 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' What he means is that everyone knows the Messiah will come from Bethlehem (as prophesied), so how can he possibly come from Nazareth?!

Jesus confounds Nathanael by knowing all about him, and Nathanael is convinced: 'You are the Son of God!'

It seems from these stories that the disciples responded to Jesus almost the first time they met him. I don't believe this was so then, and nor is it so today. Luke's version (Luke 5:1-11) gives a much fuller picture of what probably happened. The disciples had heard of Jesus, they had listened to him, they had obeyed what he asked of them, found that the result was amazing, and had eventually decided to follow him.

Christianity is not a religion where we are just expected to believe, without any information. Paul says:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14)

We too, came to Jesus by hearing and listening - I learnt of Jesus at Sunday School, and later by attending church and Bible Study. At each stage my relationship with Jesus grew and deepened – and it is still ongoing today. I believe following Jesus is a lifelong process, and it was so with the disciples. As we read the gospels we see how their relationship with Jesus developed and deepened, until after Pentecost they were empowered to do what Jesus really wanted of them!

But do notice that as each decided to follow Jesus he also told others – brothers or friends – and brought them to Jesus. That is something we are also called to do – tell others, as Paul says in the Romans passage above.

May you be blessed in your walk with Jesus, as you learn more and surrender more.

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