

Sermon for Epiphany 2, Year B in Grenoble.

Readings: 1 Samuel 3 v1-20; John 1 v43-51

You may have picked up on the fact that our Gospel reading today is from John and I mentioned last week that, in this church year, we will be mainly studying the book of Mark! So I'd better explain:

There are three liturgical years, helpfully given the letters A, B and C (!) but we have four gospels to cover.

Matthew, Mark and Luke have their own years and John's gospel is divided between the other three years.

Because Mark is the shortest of the gospels we quite possibly get more of John this year although I haven't checked up on that.

And finally, it is mainly during what we call 'Ordinary time' when we concentrate on the gospel that is set for the year; so that is the short period of time between the Christmas season and Lent and the much longer stretch between Trinity Sunday and around All Saints' Day.

I hope that helps to explain how it works! In two weeks' time we will be reading from Mark again and we will think further about the gospel as a whole and what we can expect in the months to come.

So back to this week and to John's gospel.

As you know we are in the season of Epiphany and the word Epiphany means a sudden revelation of realisation of something. An Epiphany moment is an 'Aha' or Eureka moment! A moment when you suddenly feel you understand or grasp something that had eluded you before. The Epiphany theme for the church is one of 'seeing, finding and perceiving'.

Seeing, finding and perceiving. They seem quite everyday words and can have some quite ordinary meanings. 'I see the snow falling' or 'we found a nice restaurant in town' or 'I perceived someone coming towards me in the dark'.

But they can all be a bit more exciting than that: 'Aha! I see', 'Yay, I've found it' and 'I suddenly perceived that this was something amazing'.

And in today's gospel reading we get more of the latter; epiphany moments.

Let's look at some of those sentences. 'Jesus **found** Philip'. He didn't just stumble across him. Jesus was looking for the right person and suddenly there he was.

Then Philip was dashing around until he **found** Nathaniel – he was purposefully looking for him and then he found him. 'Aha – here he is'.

And then Philip explains to Nathaniel how he and Andrew and Peter had **found** Jesus. They had a 'eureka' moment when they recognised that the Jesus who had **found** them, was the one whom Moses had written about in the Law and about whom the prophets had written. Philip is excited by their discovery. This was something and someone very special.

Philip implores Nathaniel 'come and **see**'. He's not saying 'perhaps when you've got time, you might like to check him out'. His invitation is do it straightaway – no time to lose. And he uses the word 'see' in the kind of way that suggests understanding. As we do too. Ah yes, I **see** now; I understand.

Then Jesus **saw** Nathaniel coming towards him as he had **seen** him earlier under the fig tree.

This is more than just Jesus noticing that this man now approaching him had earlier been sitting under a tree. Rather, he had a deep understanding of who this person was. Let's look at his words again. Jesus said 'Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false'. That is not information that Jesus could have gleaned just from seeing him. When Jesus saw Nathaniel he saw him fully, understood who he was – quite a revelation.

In our reading from the Old Testament we heard that wonderful story of the calling of Samuel. It is a story more of '**hearing**' than '**seeing**'. God knew Samuel and he knew the duties that he had in store for him. As Jesus called his disciples to assist him in God's work, so God called Samuel to do the same. But young Samuel was not tuned in to hearing God; it was through the perception of elderly Eli, that he came to realise who was calling him and he was then able to listen to God's message to him. His mind was opened to what God had to say to him.

The important thing about all this is that truly seeing or hearing, truly noticing, truly perceiving, demands a kind of openness or concentration or focus. How often we go around with our eyes and minds closed. I think children are often more perceptive of wonder than adults are because their minds are more open – they are still discovering the world.

Our grandson Harry is just five and he is fascinated by earthworms. He won an award at school for the best worm charmer a few months ago! Worms are not something adults usually go into raptures about! Our senses are maybe dulled by the familiarity that comes with growing up. Somehow, we often allow the world to go past us in a blur, without noticing.

And it sometimes seems that when we do notice something, it is often something we don't like – like someone pushing in front of us in a queue rather than someone who gives way to us or smiles.

We can be quick to condemn and slow to see the good in others.

We should try to be open to wonder; the wonder of people, the wonder of the world and even the wonder of ourselves – for we are God's children and wonderfully made!

How well do **we** see? On British television there is an advertisement for a chain of opticians called Specsavers. It shows a myopic shepherd sheering his sheep. He puts his hand out for the next sheep, grabs his sheep dog by mistake and shears him, not realising his mistake. The dog doesn't look best pleased about this. Then comes the catchphrase, which has received the rare distinction of passing into everyday language in the UK 'He should have gone to Specsavers'.

Epiphany challenges us to discover what it means to see Jesus and be seen by him as well, but with a deeper, different kind of seeing.

A couple of years ago we went to a museum where you wear special 3D goggles where you don't just see the scene in front and around you; you experience it, you are inhabiting it. We flew up to the steeple of a church and looked down on everything. We were on a ship with waves crashing around us. It was an immersive experience; not just come and see but come and be in this experience.

This is what Philip is trying to convey to his friend Nathaniel. The epiphany moment for Nathaniel was that he understood that Jesus knew everything

about him. This is the Christ, who knows us intimately, the God of the Psalm we read today, who has been with us since we were formed in the womb and is acquainted with all our days.

God **sees** us- sees and knows us completely, our faults and strengths, our joys and sorrows. And God sees all this with love. God is able to see our faults without dismissing us as lost causes, but rather God loves us **despite** who we are and **because** of who we are.

Maybe you could spend some time today thinking about what it means to be completely known and completely loved.

The invitation is there for us to go and be in the experience as we also decide to follow and discover more of the reality of Jesus.

And when we accept that invitation then there is a further response required of us.

The disciples slowly became aware that to follow Jesus meant living a different way from all that they had expected. The Kingdom was and is about people, relationships, love and belonging for all people.

This will become the everyday reality of following Jesus, and discovering more about what it means to see him and to be seen by him. All who follow will discover that this is the way of the cross.

Today's gospel requires us to see others as we are seen by God, to love as we are loved. An impossible job but one to which we are called. It also asks us to notice, to see, to pay attention. After all it's a beautiful world we've been put in – lets open our eyes to see its wonders and understand how we must care for it.

It is time for us to respond to all that it means to be a follower of Christ, safe and confident in the knowledge that Jesus has already seen all that we are, and yet he still calls us to be his friends, and loves us more than we can ever know.

As those who have heard Jesus' call, we don't want to be like the shepherd in that Specsavers advert. We pray that God will grant us clearer vision.

Let's do that now as we pray an adaption of the thirteenth century prayer of St Richard of Chichester together:

Thank you Lord for all the benefits which you have given us, for all the pains and insults which you bore for us.

Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may we see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Amen.