

Pathfinder

16 1 11

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature
 by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory.

My text may be found in John 1 verses 40 to 42: 'One of the two who had heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus . . .'

When I was a student at university, I first started going to my local Anglican Church in East London. St Paul's, East Ham, was evangelical by tradition and we had a thriving Sunday School for the local children. There I became a Pathfinder Leader and over the next sixteen years, I taught a class each Sunday morning and went as a leader on an annual Pathfinder Camp in different parts of the country. It was a great time and Pathfinders played a major part in shaping my faith.

The Pathfinder badge was a blue shield quartered by the cross of St Andrew. The symbols were an open book, the Bible; a lamp to suggest the light of Christ; a signpost, the cross of Christ, to point the way ahead; and a rope, a sign of the fellowship which binds us together as Christians. The white diagonal cross of St

Andrew was on our badge because we considered Andrew to be the first Pathfinder since he was the very first person to bring someone to Christ.

We have moved into the season of Epiphany which means manifestation, the way God chooses to make himself manifest, to make himself known to his creation. We have seen it in the appearance of the star which alerted the wisemen to the birth of the Messiah. We have seen it in the Baptism of Christ in which the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove alighted on Jesus as he was emerging from the Jordan and the voice of God the Father spoke the words of approbation to his Son, his beloved. Today, we see how God manifests himself through what people say and do.

Today's passage from the opening chapter of John's gospel is curious. It is the day after the baptism of Jesus. John is standing with a couple of his disciples when Jesus passes by and John tells them a profound truth about who precisely Jesus is. John says, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'. The following day the same thing happens. Jesus is walking past them and again, for a second time, John says, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' This time, John's disciples take the hint and walk away from John to follow Jesus. Jesus notices them following him, stops and asks them what they are 'looking for'? His question is at one and the same time both banal and profound. Their response, a question seems on the surface trivial, 'Rabbi, where are you staying?' But it may with the acknowledgement of his status as a teacher and with their desire to know where he is based be an implicit request to be allowed to become his disciples. Jesus replies encouragingly, 'Come and see.' They did and the rest is history.

Now of these two men was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew immediately goes off to find his brother and to share the good news with him, the excitement that he has found the Messiah. Without further ado, Andrew takes Simon Peter to Jesus and the rest is history.

The principle enshrined in this incident is the principle that underpinned Pathfinders. If Christianity is to spread and the Church is to grow, then it requires people to spread the faith. What was impressive about St Paul's East Ham in the Sixties and Seventies was the number of children who brought their friends to church because they had discovered that going to church was a fun thing to do.

What was true then is true now. Why St Bartholomew's Dinard is growing as church is that you are prepared to bring people you know and meet to church to share what you value. Why we are thriving is because you are willing to welcome those people into the church with a smile and a cup of coffee afterwards and by showing a real interest in them as individuals. There is a genuine sense of fellowship here, that this is a place where we can encounter the true and living God as revealed through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ and manifested through the presence of his Holy Spirit with us.

Epiphany, then, is a season in which we consider the idea of Emmanuel, God with us, and how the God we respect and worship chooses to manifest himself to people. Today, through the example of John the Baptist who pointed people in Jesus' direction and Andrew who brought his brother Simon to Jesus, we can see

that one sure way to ensure the future of the Church and of our church, St Bartholomew's, is to speak to our friends about what we believe and to bring them to church. It is down to you whether you do or not and whether or not when others do, you make the place feel warm and welcoming, open to all who come through our doors.

May we all be Pathfinders at heart.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

16th January, 2011

H: Sermon 23: Pathfinder

