

## New disciples

19 1 14

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.

Our text today is taken from verses 38 and 39 of John chapter 1:

“Rabbi, where are you staying ?”

“Come and see.”

Have you ever tried to chat someone up ? Silly question ! Of course you have. Perhaps a better question might be, ‘Do you remember the last time you tried ?’ The problem is how to go from being on the outside, being beyond the pale, to bridging the gap between you both, ultimately to become an accepted part of another person’s inner circle. It all depends on how good you are, how confident you are, at talking to strangers, at making contact with people you don’t know. My mum was a past master of the art !

You must know that John’s gospel is a very different take on the life of Jesus to that found in the other three – Matthew, Mark and Luke – the Synoptic gospels. So the first chapter, part of which was our gospel reading today, is a good

illustration of this. The first 18 verses are a uniquely evocative account of the Incarnation. Then, the focus switches to John the Baptist, a son of a priest, questioned by priests sent from Jerusalem about whom he thinks he is. That is Day One. Day Two, John points Jesus out to some of his disciples as 'the Lamb of God' and there's a reference to, rather than an account of, the Baptism of Jesus which is likely to have taken place the previous day. Day Three, again John points out Jesus to his disciples as 'the Lamb of God' and two of them, unnamed, go and follow Jesus. Day Four, one of them, it turns out to be Andrew, takes his brother, Simon, to see Jesus who promptly nicknames him Peter ! Day Five completes the opening chapter with Jesus calling Philip to follow him and Philip shooting off to find his mate, Nathaniel, and bringing him to meet Jesus. Here ends the first chapter. It's a very different start, a very different account of how five of the disciples came to follow Jesus, with our patron, St Bartholomew, being called Nathaniel, the name given him at his circumcision rather than by his family's surname. And there's no mention whatsoever of the Temptation in the Wilderness.

That said, I'd like this morning just to consider how these five people: Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathaniel aka Bartholomew, and one unnamed lad came to follow Jesus.

The first is simple. John points out Jesus to them. Two of the disciples hear what's said, 'Behold the Lamb of God'. They understand something of what John means by calling Jesus 'the Lamb of God'– that Jesus is the Messiah, chosen by God to fulfil the will of God. And they act on what they have heard and

understood by following Jesus. Jesus turns round and speaks to them first, breaking the ice. His question – ‘What are you looking for?’ – has more than one meaning but typically it goes to the heart of the matter, challenging them, inviting them to think. They simply reply, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” which in itself implies more than is actually said. Then Jesus invites them to “Come and see.” which they do. All we have just heard is coded language for a student asking a teacher if he could be his pupil.

The second is classic in which Andrew, one of the two disciples of John the Baptist just mentioned, shares what he’s found with his brother then he takes Simon to meet Jesus. The meeting strikes a chord in Simon’s hearts and soul and Jesus gives him a new name, Peter (the rock), a sure sign of acceptance and a bond having been forged between them.

The third is Philip being directly spoken to by Jesus who invites him to be one of his disciples with the classic command, ‘Follow me’. And Philip does but not before, like Andrew, he goes off to share what he’s found, not with his brother but with his friend, Nathaniel, whom he brings to Jesus and who in turn is so well impressed by him that he utters the truth we know: ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel !

So there are the first five disciples: Simon Peter and Andrew, Philip and Nathaniel aka Bartholomew, and a fifth, unnamed disciple. Who is he? William Barclay guesses he is none other than John, the beloved disciple who’s writing this gospel. And why does Barclay think so? A tiny detail in the text: in verse 39, we

read – ‘it was about four o’clock in the afternoon’ – for John to note the actual time of day surely means that he was there at that very time and that he was well-impressed by what he heard and saw and above all with Jesus, his new Rabbi.

So let me end by asking you the question, ‘How do we/did we become followers of Christ?’ We need someone to point Jesus out to us. We need to be able to respond with interest to what’s been said to us. We can go off and find Jesus on our own with the prospect that he’ll meet us on the way and speak to us. Or someone can kindly take us there so we’re not going on our own. Fact is, the best way to come to church is to be invited, to come with a friend.

So who are you going to invite next week?

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*

*19<sup>th</sup> January, 2014*

G: Sermons 29 : New disciples

