

Disciples

15 1 17

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 may be found in today's gospel, part of John chapter 2 and verse 39:

' . . . they remained with him . . . '

Last week, I asked a question about the baptism of Jesus. That wonderful, marvellous moment when Jesus is coming up out of the water – dripping wet – when the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, flies down to alight on him and a voice from heaven declares, **'You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.'** (Lk 3 v22) And my question was who heard, who saw? Jesus clearly did – the words in the gospels according to Mark and Luke are addressed directly to him. John the Baptist – possibly. And I wondered who else might have witnessed God's dramatic and glowing approving in public of his Son at the start of Jesus' public ministry? Well, in today's gospel passage, John the Baptist says of Jesus, **'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it remained on him'** (v32). No mention here of the voice; no mention either of John the Baptist actually baptising Jesus, but here, in part, is an answer to my question.

Now, today, I'd like to move on, from the baptism of Jesus to what it might mean to be a disciple of Jesus. According to my OED, the word 'disciple' comes from the Latin verb 'discere', to learn, and applies to a student, to a pupil, to one of Jesus' followers, to someone who is subject to discipline, studying under the instruction of a master, a teacher, a Rabbi.

Well this Christmas, Janet and Geoff Scott gave me an excellent, little book by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams entitled 'Being Disciples – Essentials of the Christian Life' and I was so impressed reading it that the book will be the basis, the focus of our Lent Bible Studies this year in March and April. So, to whet your appetite, I'd like to touch briefly on the point that Rowan Williams makes in his opening chapter on what it might mean to be a disciple.

Unsurprisingly, the key is in our text today – '**. . . they remained with him . . .**' John is speaking to two of his disciples and points Jesus out to them, telling them that he is **the Lamb of God** (v29). In verse 40, we learn that one of John the Baptist's disciples is Andrew; the other may well be John the Evangelist who is writing this gospel. And because **the Lamb of God** is a Messianic title, these two disciples of John the Baptist are being pointed by him in the direction of the real thing – Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

An extraordinary dialogue takes place. Seeing them following him, Jesus says:

What are you looking for ?

Rabbi where are you staying

Come and see

The words mean so much more than they appear to mean on the surface. When Jesus asks them what they are looking for, it is not directions to the local Tesco's but, more profoundly, what do they want out of life? How do they want to connect effectively with God? When they ask Jesus where he's staying, it's not so much asking to know the place but asking to come and stay with him. If they were footballers, what they're asking for is a transfer; as students, they are asking to change their teacher. Then, finally Jesus' invite – come and see is not simply to see for themselves where he's staying at present but to come and join him – a clear invitation for them to follow him, to be with him.

And so to our text today – '**... they remained with him ...**' The really exciting challenging point that Rowan Williams is making is what it meant to be a disciple in those days and the challenge that that makes to us nowadays. Then to be a disciple was a 24/7 way of life. 24 hours a day; 7 days a week! You lived with your Master, ate with your teacher, stayed with your rabbi all the time without a break. You listened to all he had to say; you watched what he did and absorbed first-hand not only what he taught but how he lived his life. A disciple was subject to discipline, the discipline of being present in the presence of one you looked up to, respected, admired, obeyed.

And, for us, my question this morning – if we are really going to be serious about our faith, about what we believe, and about how we live our lives, is Jesus an ever-present reality for us? We may not be aware of him all the time, but he is there with us always – whatever; however; whenever!

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 35 : Disciples

