

SERMON AT 8.00 AM HOLY COMMUNION (BCP) AT ST JAMES' CHURCH, YARMOUTH AND 6.00 PM EVENING PRAYER (BCP) AT ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, CALBOURNE ON SUNDAY 14TH JANUARY 2018 (2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY) BY JAMES COOK

Readings: Revelation 5.1-10 and John 1.43-51

Title: 'Who, me?'

Aim: To help us to recognise and respond to the call of Jesus.

How are you feeling about God and about church on this the second Sunday of January – still the start of the New Year? Perhaps, like me, you have enjoyed some rest after a busy Christmas and year-end. You might be wishing that the rest would continue just a little longer, or you might want to get going – to start something new or to pick up the threads of something important that you were doing last year.

As we move from rest to activity, let's pause to consider what God might be saying to us about the future. Is there something unexpected that we need to hear, or are we becoming aware of something that needs to be refreshed and made relevant for today?

The Bible readings for this season of the year, Epiphany, are concerned with God's revelation and men and women's reactions to that revelation. Jesus the Son of God is revealed to those who live outside the confines of Jewish culture and territory into which he has been born. We observe the reactions of others and we consider our own reactions to that revelation. Do we reject what we see or do we receive it?

In today's Gospel reading, we learn that Jesus is not what, in the business world, we would call a single operator a sole practitioner. He recruits apprentices to work with him and to learn from him. In this passage and in the preceding verses, we learn that the first disciples – later called apostles – of Jesus included Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel. From the other Gospel writers, we may deduce that Nathaniel was also known as Bartholomew. We are not given the name of another disciple featured in today's Gospel reading, but he is generally reckoned to be the author of John's Gospel.

What kinds of person does Jesus choose to work with him, to be members of his team? Some observers make much of the fact that Jesus chose only men and that this disqualifies women from being ordained priests or bishops. That is a personal view, to which I do not subscribe.

Jesus did not choose ready-made ministers of the Gospel. He chose ordinary men, but men with potential. Later on, Jesus chose a variety of men and women to be his witnesses and to form his Church.

We know, from later events, that Peter began his training as impetuous and unreliable, but he was transformed into the dependable rock upon which Jesus was to build his Church. Philip is one who introduces others to Jesus, and we'll come back to him shortly. Nathaniel, probably alias Bartholomew, is able to move rapidly from doubting the worth and significance of Jesus to submitting to his authority as Son of God and spiritual King of Israel.

The first Israel, Jacob – father of the tribes of Israel – in a dream had seen the angels of God ascending to heaven on a stairway and descending to earth again. Jesus is revealed to Nathaniel, and to us, as the one who will fulfil that vision. Those who are close to Jesus will see heaven open and Jesus himself as the way by which they and we gain entrance.

The language that Jesus employs in this first encounter with Nathaniel draws us, as the audience, to look not only towards the more immediate prospect of his death and resurrection but also towards his second coming. At each of these times, as John tells us later in his Gospel, Jesus will draw all people to himself.¹

Let's now return to Philip. I find the following comments about him from one Bible scholar, Bruce Milne, rather interesting:

'Philip usually appears in association with Andrew, and in situations where he is somewhat out of his depth. This may explain why Jesus apparently took direct initiative in calling him (43b); left to himself, Philip might have been too reluctant to pursue his interest to the point of commitment.'²

There was a special place in Jesus' team for such a person. Might there be another place for someone here today who needs to be encouraged and given self-confidence?

In John's Gospel, we see Jesus revealed as Son of God. John describes, often with much personal detail, the reactions of individuals and groups to this revelation. Although, as we know from other passages, some reject this revelation, Philip and Nathaniel receive it and in their individual ways respond.

Philip depends upon Jesus to encourage him. Nathaniel, on the other hand, soon moves forward in faith. Jesus informs and teaches him about the direction in which to move: towards further revelation of the Son of God and Son of Man, who will lead us ultimately to heaven.

We believe it likely, though not certain, that the John who wrote the Gospel that bears his name also wrote the Book of Revelation. Here, in vivid and awesome word pictures, we see the revelation of Jesus in the context of persecution. The followers of Jesus are suffering martyrdom under a Roman regime that is increasingly hostile to those who will not worship the emperor.

¹ John 12.34

² Milne, B, *The Message of John*, IVP 1993, p58

In today's Epistle reading, we see Jesus revealed as the Lamb of God. In John's vision of the end times, the one who has died on the cross to atone for our sins has been raised to new life. He occupies centre stage and he is worshipped as the only one worthy to open the scroll – precursor of the modern book – in which are written God's purposes for humanity and the whole cosmos.

What is our reaction to the revelation that Jesus uses team players and that he provides his followers with the way to heaven? Do we want to join his team and go his way, or shall we reject the idea?

There is no compulsion, but there is a warm and loving invitation. As he said to Philip, so Jesus says to each one of us: "Follow me." Amen.