

When we were Paris last year we went to an English language church. During the service two people were baptised. One was an eleven year old girl who had become Christian on a youth camp. She had asked for a full immersion baptism so an inflatable pool had been put in the church. The other person was a university student, a young woman from Iran. She had heard a church bell in Iran which seemed to say come and worship here. So she went to church and became a Christian.

It was very moving as they both stood in front of the church in Paris and told their story.

People meet Jesus in many different ways. There are many stories of people from Islamic countries who have a vision of Jesus who calls them to follow him. Many people will have had Christian parents. They went to Sunday school and so came to believe in Jesus. Others may have heard the gospel at a meeting or from a friend. Many were converted at Billy Graham Crusades some years ago.

I went to a church a school so went to lots of chapel services, heard lots of sermons and had evening prayers each day. But it was all very dry and formal. God seemed very remote. But one year I was having trouble in maths exams. When I was really stuck on a maths problem I started to pray to God for help and after I had prayed I could see how to answer it. This happened too often to be a coincidence. I decided I better start reading the Bible and find out more about this God. So I read my Bible and began to pray regularly. Later I joined a Bible study group and came to know Jesus in a much deeper way.

In our Bible reading today we see five people who met Jesus and came to follow him. It is important to see that they met a person. They didn't just believe a set of facts or ideas. They came to experience Jesus' love, to hear his wisdom and to see God's glory revealed in Jesus. They came to know Jesus.

John says, *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14) Later when some people stopped following Jesus, Jesus asks if they will leave him. Peter says, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68)

Today we look at how they met Jesus.

## 1. Introduction

I might introduce you to a friend of mine. I could say, "I would like you to meet a friend of mine, Joe. He is married to Mary and they have two kids. He works as a chemist. He knows a lot about photography and has helped me with my photography." Now you have met Joe and know some things about him but you can't say you really know him yet.

So John the Baptist introduces two of his disciples to Jesus. *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>30</sup> This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'<sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."* (1:29-31)

Andrew goes and finds his brother Peter and tells him, *"We have found the Messiah"* (1:41) Then we read, <sup>45</sup> *Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* (1:45)

So these five disciples came to hear some facts about Jesus. They heard that he is greater than John; that he is the Messiah; that he is the one predicted by Moses and the prophets; and that he is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. That last one must have been a real puzzle for them then. It wasn't till later that they would understand that this meant Jesus would die as a sacrifice for sin.

Jesus himself finds Philip but with all the others someone introduced them to Jesus. The theme of bearing witness is important in John. The way most people come to meet Jesus is that someone bears witness to Jesus - someone introduces them to Jesus.

Who introduced you to Jesus? How did it happen?

When we get to know Jesus our job is then to introduce other people to him. That is what it is, introducing them to a person, Jesus. It isn't just telling people a list of things they must believe. "God loves you. Jesus died for your sin and so on". The four Gospels are all about the person of Jesus. We need to introduce people to him as a person.

### **2. Getting to know**

Once I have introduced you to my friend Joe you might spend time with him yourself. You might get to know his family. He might help you with photography or with something else. You would get to know him personally, what sort of person he is and you would experience his kindness.

That is what these disciples did with Jesus. They go with Jesus and spend time with him. They ask him questions starting with, "Where are you staying?" Jesus says to the disciples, "Come and see." Philip also says to Nathaniel, "Come and see." Getting to know Jesus is about coming and seeking him, coming and finding out for yourself, honestly inquiring, even exploring your doubts. Nathaniel says, "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" (1:46) He questions whether Jesus could be the Messiah. Jesus welcomes his question. "*Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.*" (1:47) He has no deceit; he is sceptical but is prepared to examine the evidence honestly.

Don't be afraid to ask questions and express your doubts. It is the only way to really find the truth. Come with an open mind.

Jesus says to Philip as he does later to all the disciples, "*Follow me.*" (1:43) To follow Jesus means to be a disciple. It means to recognise Jesus as Lord, your master. It means to put your trust in him. It means to put him first even before your own interests.

We may have questions about Jesus, things we don't understand. It is important to work on those things but at some stage we have to make a decision. We won't know everything about Jesus. There will still be things we don't understand but we can know enough to make that decision to follow.

It is like many other decisions we make in life like buying a house. When buying a house you look at web sites, you go to open house, look carefully at the layout, and look for leaks or cracks; you probably get an engineer's inspection and a pest inspection; you look at the location and transport options and so on. But in the end you can't know everything. At some stage you must make a decision to ring the agent and agree on the price, pay the deposit and sign the contract papers. It is a big decision but you must decide. Unless you make that decision you will never get the house.

Have you made the decision to follow Jesus? If not, what is stopping you? Investigate then decide. We need to work on getting to know him so we can make that decision. Who is he? Is he worth following? Then decide.

But of course it doesn't stop there.

### **3. Growing relationship.**

With any friendship the relationship grows as we share experiences together, especially as we go through difficult times together.

Here the disciples seem to be very confident that they understand who Jesus is. Andrew says, *"We have found the Messiah"* (1:41) Philip says, *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* (1:45) When Jesus shows a supernatural knowledge of Nathanael he says, *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."* (1:49)

It is not that these things are wrong but there is much they don't know. One of the themes of John's Gospel is how the disciples misunderstand Jesus. They often show their lack of understanding. We know how often Peter puts his foot in it. He gets it wrong. At one point Jesus has to say to him, "Get behind me Satan."

It takes a long while for them to really come to understand Jesus and for their faith to deepen and grow: to have a much deeper appreciation of who Jesus is - what it means for him to be God and man; to comprehend the true significance of his death; to work through what following him means in daily life.

They had to grow in their relationship with Jesus like this and so do we. It is a process that never ends in this life. We continue to get to know him better as we walk with him.

Jesus says to Nathaniel, *"You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."*<sup>51</sup> He then added, *"Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."* (1:50-51)

Jesus is referring to an event back in Genesis 28. Jacob had a vision where he saw a stairway to heaven. Angels were ascending and descending on it. God is revealed to Jacob in this event. Jesus promises that in a much greater way God will be revealed to us in Jesus. The disciples will see spiritual realities in Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection. They will see heaven open.

And so will we as we walk with Jesus day by day. This is Jesus' promise. As we pray, read his word, worship him, and study his word together; as we experience his presence in good times and bad we will see God revealed in Jesus.

### **What will you do?**

The disciples had to "come and see". They had to spend time with Jesus and get to know him. They had to decide to "follow Jesus", and having decided they had to walk with him day by day. So their relationship with Jesus and their faith in him grew. They came to know Jesus in a much deeper way. So John could say, *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (1:14)

What will you do this year: How will you 'come and see'? How will you get to know Jesus, or know him better? Are you part of a group to study the Bible? Could you join a group that would introduce you to Jesus and answer questions?

Think about what you will do this year.