

Sunday 17th January, 2021 - Sermon for Epiphany 2B - The Text: John 1:43-51

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from God our heavenly Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen.

The season of Christmas celebrates the coming of the Son of God in human flesh to save and rescue His people.

The season of Epiphany is about God revealing that this Jesus, born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, is the promised Messiah. Jesus is the long promised and much hoped for rescuer from God, and He manifests His divine power in the spoken word, and in signs and wonders.

Epiphany begins with the sign of the star in the sky which guides the Gentile wise-men to Bethlehem, and the rest of Epiphany shows how Jesus was revealed as the Son of God to all who would hear Him.

God *must* reveal Himself to us or we wouldn't know where or how to find Him. Many people think they can find God through religious experiences, charismatic leaders, and even participating in non-Christian worship practises. But such things don't lead us to God, they lead us away from Him and place us in spiritual danger.

God can't be found by humans. God finds us. He often comes to us through someone who already knows Him. This someone trusts in God. They know His life changing love and they want us to have it too.

This is the pattern we see in the Bible. A Jewish servant girl told Naaman about the prophet of the Lord who could heal him and he was cleansed of his skin disease and given faith (2 Kings 5).

Four friends brought their crippled mate on a mattress to Jesus and he was cured and made whole in body and soul (Mark 2:1-12).

Philip spoke with the Ethiopian about Jesus and he was baptised (Acts 8:26-39).

Believers in Jesus bring those in need of God's grace to Jesus. This is what we see happen to Nathanael when Philip asked him to come and see Jesus. Philip knew Jesus. The Lord had said, "Follow Me" and Philip did, and he knew the Lord. He heard and saw that Jesus is the One whom Moses in the Law, and also the prophets wrote about.

The Spirit filled Word of God revealed to Philip who Jesus was. Everything he heard from Jesus and saw Him do confirmed it. His eyes were opened. His heart was transformed. Philip is so excited that he goes and tells his friend Nathanael that the promised Redeemer has come, and he wants Nathanael to know the Lord too.

Someone did that for you. It was probably your parents or maybe a friend. They pointed you to Jesus saying come and see. Come and see the Saviour who has fulfilled the Law and everything God's prophets said He would. Come and hear what He has done for you.

Christian parents bring their children to be baptised, and in water and the word a child sees and hears Jesus at work—cleansing, forgiving, creating new life and giving a new identity. Without Baptism's gifts of rebirth and faith no one could find God.

In Baptism you received the most wonderful gift from God because you were found by Him, and the joy and comfort you have in knowing Jesus lasts more than that moment. Knowing Jesus means a life time of forgiveness and mercy. Jesus is the One who saves us, and in Him we see God.

The Jesus we don't really want to look at, is the bloodied body of Christ hanging on the cross. Most Christians prefer baby Jesus in a manger or 'Jesus my friend' or glorified Jesus in heaven. And He is those things, but Jesus is no friend, and no Saviour, and has no glory, without the cross and death.

It's not pleasant to see Jesus suffer God's judgment for us. To see Him dying. To see on Him all those sins we shrug off or consider a normal part of life. It's horrifying. But take a look and see.

Because once you do, then you realise the immensity of God's love for you. Then you realise that Jesus fulfils the Law of God and the words of the prophets, and to do that is no small thing. The Father gave up His Son into death, for you. The Son laid aside His divine powers, to die as an atonement for you. And He wanted to do that, so you can have freedom and life.

And so, continuing on, Philip goes to his friend Nathanael to tell him that God's Saviour has come. But Nathanael couldn't believe it. This Jesus didn't sound like the Saviour he'd been looking for. After all, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip doesn't try and convince or push Nathanael into believing who Jesus is, he simply invites him to, "Come and see."

But before Nathanael sees Jesus, the Lord sees him. Jesus knows Nathanael. He knows his heart. Jesus knows all our faults and yet in love He still welcomes us.

We heard in Psalm 139 today that God knows us. He knew us before we were born. He knows our words before we speak them. There is no where we can go to hide from Him. This can sound threatening, because God can see our darkest sins and desires. But despite this, He welcomes us that we may be made holy, washed and forgiven.

And so, Jesus sees Nathanael, and Nathanael will speak the Gospel because he saw and heard the grace of God and was changed by it. Like the patriarch Jacob, Nathanael will see heaven open before him, but not in a dream, it will take place when he sees Jesus die on the cross and be resurrected three days later. Jesus comes from heaven to open its doors by shedding His blood, so that sinners like Philip and Nathanael, and you and I may believe and enter into paradise.

How often do we desire God like Nathanael did, and yet overlook Him because we can only see our problems and hurt and shame? Turn your eyes from them and look at Jesus on the cross. That's how He wants you to see Him. If your sins are laid on Him, then they are not on you—you are free of them.

If your death is laid on Jesus, then you will no longer die, but live. If His rising again is for you, then salvation and life everlasting are yours. Heaven's doors have been opened wide for you to one-day pass through them. In God's eyes you are already there.

But we are not there yet; living in eternity. We live here and have no end of troubles and pains. The sins of others impact us and we hurt others with our sins. We have fears and worries and sometimes we wonder, "where are you now Jesus. I can see you on the cross, and I'm thankful for that, but what about now; in my pain, carrying my crosses, living life here?"

So in conclusion The Good News is that Jesus is here now, for us. He's here, speaking, washing, feeding, forgiving. He's here strengthening our faith and growing us in hope and trust. This doesn't mean it is going to be easy. Life's never a breeze, the devil makes sure of that.

But He who has called us is faithful. He has made us a part of His body; He cannot forget us or abandon us. He has overcome the darkness of death and He will lead us through every dark time we face.

This is the Good News of Jesus on the cross. Forgiveness and salvation are ours as a free gift and this has changed us. We are comforted by our crucified Saviour. We have joy that God smiles on us, and this shapes the way we live now, desiring others to come and see Jesus, that they would know Him too.

The invitation to come and see Jesus is for all His disciples, throughout our whole life. There is always something new to discover, or something old to learn again, and the depth of God's love for us is new for us every day.

And so, we need to come and see Jesus, often, and not dwell on our sins, or focus on our troubles. Come and see and hear the Gospel and be assured that He has opened heaven gates for us.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.