

In the name of the Father....

This week we continue our observance of the Epiphany Season as we explore how God is manifest to humanity, or how God is shown to each of us and those who are around us. Last week we considered two different Call Narratives – the call of Samuel and the Call of Phillip and Nathanael - and what these tell us about how we encounter God. I hope you have had some time to consider what moves you to faith and where you encounter God. Those times when we can either say ‘Speak Lord your servant is listening’ or ‘Come and See!’

Today we are going to extend this to consider the ways in which we engage with God. What does it mean for us to have encountered Jesus – how are we fellow servants in the Kingdom of God. How do we relate to and engage with the ongoing revelation of God?

Then finally next Sunday we will go on to the ways in which we are Transformed by God. Our encounter with God transforms our view of the world and the way that we live within it – how we are enabled to become fully the people who God created.

One of the great challenges of our faith is that we encounter God, or have our own ‘Call Narrative’ and the encounter stays in that moment. A bit like a holiday treat which we keep boxed in one part of our lives but do not allow it to impact on the experience of our day-to-day. Faith however is not about a definable moment but a relationship, which changes and grows over time. And like all relationships – our relationship with God takes work and time!

Our reading from John’s Gospel today is the third part of the Epiphany picture which shows us who Jesus is. In John we hear that Jesus is baptised, then he calls his first disciples and now today we hear the story of his first public miracle. And the gospel writer tells us that even this simple act causes the disciples to *believe!*

The miracle of the Wedding in Cana is significant not just because it is the first but because of where it takes place.

Cana is not in Judea. It is in Galilee. Galilee was known for its thieves, rebels, and Gentiles. Herod the Great had to clear the area of brigands twice in his life. It was in Gentile territory that Jesus made his adult home and performed his first miracle in the Gospel of John. From the very beginning therefore, Jesus is portrayed as a trans-national figure in the Gospel. His life and work go beyond the boundaries of race and nation. This Kingdom of God is not just for a chosen few but for all who would believe.

This is also a quiet miracle – it is not a flashy show of power – Jesus appears event to be reluctant - but the persistence of his mother led him to perform what has become one of the most famous of his miracles.

There is much that we might explore in the Gospel story about Jesus time – and the references to his death and resurrection – but as we explore our relationship with God I want us to focus on one aspect of this miracle – the fact that God is responsive to people's needs. God is not aloof to the human plight. Even if he is inconvenienced by the request for more wine, his heart is larger than the stone jars. Some people have come to question the divine response to human suffering and have concluded that there is no God. But this quiet miracle suggests that sometimes God engages with us quietly without us even being aware.

Faith is the purpose of this miracle, as it is in all the miracles in John's Gospel. Faith is the reason the John wrote this Gospel. Faith is the reason that we seek out or respond to the call of God – but what does faith look like as a relationship with God?

What John's gospel, and indeed all the gospel writers, tries to clarify for us is that Jesus comes to give us insight into the one true God. And while Jesus came with authority and power, he did not always appear in the way that we might expect – or coerce us into believing in the one true God. It is up to us to engage and use the gifts which God has given us – in the words that we heard earlier from the book of Revelation - *comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!*

So what does it mean to be true to Jesus – to hold true to our faith?

Firstly we have certainty in God – our faith tells us that we have a relationship with God and that we have a responsibility to maintain that confidence.

Secondly, not all things which are spoken of God, preached about God, given as the word of God are true. Our faith requires discernment. One of the key things which makes us Christians is that our faith in is Jesus – not in a book or a tradition or even a worship style. Our faith is informed by the bible and tradition and our worship – but it does not define it. This means our faith requires us to engage our thinking and engage with God and with one another.

That is one of the reasons as Anglicans we commit to ‘read, mark and inwardly digest’ the scriptures. Understanding the teachings of our faith takes time and effort. There are very few definitive answers within our faith – this is both a gift of trust and a lifelong commitment to learning on our part. The nature of our faith means that each of us will find different texts, sermons or even acts of worship helpful in our faith, and so we have to be alert to what we are hearing and whether it is relevant to our faith.

Christian faith is active. Yes we are called to pray and to read the bible and to worship together – but more importantly we are called to engage with

these processes in a critical and discerning way - listening for God in each encounter!

This may feel like it is a lot of work – or even that we are not fulfilling our obligations of faith - But this sermon is not about trying to instil a feeling of guilt into any of us – rather it is about recognising the different ways we engage with God on a daily basis and the freedom which God encourages within us to question and critique the actions of our faith. (As you may know I am a bit of a Harry Potter Fan and at one point in the story Dumbledore turns to Harry to say ‘It is our choices which make us who we are Harry – not our name or our gifts!’ This is same advice which God would give us – it is not our giftedness or skills or even our names which is required for us to engage in our faith – it is our choices and whether we allow our faith to inform those choices.

This is one of the reasons our worship life together is so important – and why in this parish we offer so many spaces and times when we might worship together. In worship we have a chance to listen together – to express together. It provides us with an accountability which we might not otherwise have. We spoke last week of the importance of spiritual direction in helping us to explore the encounters we have with God, in the same way our worship life together provides a mirror to our engagement with God. Our communal worship gives accountability to our faithfulness to prayer and study of the scriptures – but it also provides us with support and care to guide us on our journey. Our collective worship makes us engage with God by the nature of its structure – even when we might prefer to be doing something else. And the point of our faith is this engagement – this relationship which informs the way we live.

As you will be aware we are currently preparing 9 people for confirmation. The sacrament of confirmation is an ‘outward and visible sign’ of our commitment to faith. Like all sacraments its purpose is to make God visible to the world. In this very broad sense our very lives are then a sacrament and the ultimate example of our engagement and relationship with God. Our Christian lives as individuals and as a community should make God visible to the world. As part of our confirmation classes this week we reflected on the origin of sacraments. We looked at the fact that the celebration of every sacrament follows the original pattern which was used and experienced by the first believers 2000 years ago

- Christ’s followers gather together as a community
- This community listens to the word of God
- The community share the experience of God’s action.
- They depart to service others and bring them the Good News

The clear pattern which was set by the early church, and is still followed by us today makes it clear that to be a follower of Christ is not simply a private arrangement between God and the individual. Being a follower of Christ means being part of a community; part of the Body of Christ here on earth. Becoming part of the body doesn’t mean we lose our individuality but rather

we become more fully ourselves because we are accepted in our baptism and are united with God and every other person in love and care.

Even at the beginning of Jesus Ministry, as we see in John's gospel, Jesus makes this clear. In the quiet and simple miracle of water turned into wine – we do not see focus on the needs of an individual but rather that of community life. In Christ, the very nature of glory is being redefined. It is glory with a silent purpose and aim, to create and maintain faith in Christ Jesus who responds to human need in ways that seem hidden and mysterious, but whose deeds are open to the eyes of faith.

Once we have an encounter with God – we begin to develop our relationship with God bit by bit – and then we encounter some more – and engage some more and so on. The point of our engagement in these words – ‘God has a picture in his heart of the person we are capable of becoming’ – our faith is about allowing this fulfilment to come true. The gift of God to us in Christ is that Jesus shows us how to be ourselves. Next week we will go on to consider this transforming power of Christ – the ways which God opens of us to be fully the children of God. You may be interested also in taking some time to look at the resource stand at the back of church which also has a number of leaflets up these topics.

When Jesus asks the servants to fill the empty clay jars at the wedding with water he marks for us an important moment in history. When the old covenant, the old promises of God become new. He marks that moment when the waters of baptism which quench our thirst and refresh us – become not just signs of new life – but a sign of the abundance of God's love. In the quiet act of water into wine Jesus gives us a glimpse of the possibility of the heavenly kingdom. And so it is with our faith – in our encounters with God we glimpse the possibilities – but in our engagement with God, in our day to day living out of the faith we live out the body of Christ – we become the people that God created.

So let us continue to worship together. Amen.