

2017-01-15 Alison Cooper
Epiphany 2 John 1: 29 - 42

May these words give only and always glory to God. Amen.

Of course, we know well the story that we heard last week of the stargazing Wise Men, who were compelled to follow this bright light, not knowing its true significance but trusting that it would one day lead them to their hearts' longing. And indeed, it seems that that was so, even though what they discovered was no more nor less than a child, but one who was the cradle of God, revealed at the heart of a human family.

The season of stargazing, focusing on following the light, continues in Epiphany for a few more weeks. But the Magi's story and ours will take us onwards, beyond that, for those men in their wisdom, did not rest for more than a short while at the house of Joseph and Mary, but soon journeyed back, albeit on a different route, carrying who knows what transformation of life within them.

We don't hear of them again, but may I suggest, they leave us with a clear message that an intrinsic part of our story, is our life's work to continuously seek out where the light of the Christ child is revealed in the world today, and proclaim it - and if we are blessed with an epiphany moment ourselves, the Spirit of God, that restless Spirit, seems to call us ever onwards.

In the gospel story today, we have moved on, what, 30 years? And we see how in John the Baptist, the practice of stargazing is alive and well. What we know about John, is that he was a prophet of the highest order, a cousin of Jesus, an eccentric ascetic living a life of extreme self-denial - but watching, seeking, praying for the light to come into the world, with a gathering of disciples whom, we assume, share in his life's pattern and his longing.

This passage tells of John's Epiphany moment, the time when he saw the light and his gaze finally comes to rests upon the one whom he has been seeking his whole life - 'there is the Lamb of God', he declares. 'There he is - I saw the Spirit of God descend upon him in the river. And now I see clearly! Behold, at last, the Son of God...'

It is also a moment of farewell for John, as his disciples, urged by his proclamation, leave him. They go, just as did the shepherds from their flocks, the Magi from distant lands, the crowds who surrounded Jesus in dusty streets and hillsides, they go - just as we have today; they go to find out just who Jesus is, this enigmatic, charismatic, wandering preacher.

The scene is set, the work of Jesus about to begin; and we hear him ask of two of John's disciples – 'what are you looking for?' It's a question that hangs over many of us throughout our lives... What will satisfy that longing for peace or fulfilment or understanding that bugs us so often? What are we looking for, when we come here on a Sunday morning?

The answer will be different no doubt for each of us, I can't answer for you - and indeed the disciples answer with a question of their own - 'where are you staying?' provoking an invitation from Jesus - 'come and see – come and meet me, come and find out for yourselves where I dwell, what I'm about'.

To me, those words are deeply significant - so much so that I used them to head up our children's worship at St. Andrew's up the hill: Come and See - about Christmas: Come and See - about Easter and so on. It's the invitation that might be on all our lips to any community...come and see what it's like, to be part of a church family, to be amongst people who believe that there's something more, people on a journey who trust that love will have the final word. Come and hear the stories, the good news, that we have to share...

So it is that this gospel reading then offers a very different story of the calling of the first disciples, a different first encounter, well, certainly for Andrew, who in John's gospel, does not leave boats and nets and lakeside. He leaves John the Baptist. He moves from one teacher to another, in stark contrast to the gathering of the disciples in the gospel stories found elsewhere. But however these stories may contradict each other, the same experience is recorded, that in whatever way people encounter Jesus, he draws them, and us, into a new way of being and seeing. (*Mentioned in John Pridmore's reflections.*)

And Andrew did 'see' straight away - another Epiphany moment! - and fetched his brother, Simon, at whom Jesus simply looked. You might be Simon now, says Jesus, but you will be Peter - the rock. Jesus tells us too who we are - but he also tells us who we could be... For he is able to see deep into the hearts of us all, pinpointing our fracture-lines, if you like, that need acknowledging, soothing, mending, so that whatever pains us, can be made whole and set us free.

But then, God always chooses unlikely people... Us? Yes, us too... for this is our story - the searching, the longing, called to share in his mission of love not from any condition of wholeness - but like Simon Peter, as a work in progress, stepping out into a new world.

Today, the star is resting over this place - its light has led us here and maybe, just for now, this is where we are asked to pause, to survey the land in which we rest and to enjoy God's hospitality offered by God's people.

Every time we gather in worship and fellowship, celebrating a God-moment in our community, we come as people searching for meaning, for purpose, stargazers maybe open to the possibility of God out there in the world, where God's peace is in desperate need but in here too. We need that same peace within our hearts and minds, to set us on the road to wholeness and beyond to transformation.

And now to our Creator be all praise and glory.
Amen.