

January 18, 2015

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

When we hear Gospel readings such as today.... I think on the twelve disciples....and why Jesus chose those particular human beings to be his starting line-up.

Then thinking about the twelve...I have a difficult job at best remembering their names.

I am sure I am the only one here that has that gap in our memory..well I know I am not because Ken and Dolores and John Kuney were in the same boat as I last Wednesday when we asked ourselves that question.

I understand traditional homilies demand that the preacher preaches and the congregation listens. Well how about a break in tradition? Hands up anyone who can name the twelve without going onto their smart phone?

Well I Googled the answer yesterday.....Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Nathanael who we call Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector;

James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him."

It is a known fact that when Jesus walked this earth, a vast multitude followed Him. They came for all sorts of reasons—some noble, some selfish. The same is true today. It's important that we understand what motivates people to come to Christ, because I believe not all who seek Him are really His followers

So...w hay do we follow Jesus?

I see the invitation from Jesus to "Follow me" as an opportunity to learn from Jesus how to live authentically.

The beautiful life that Jesus lived—marked by a passionate love for God and a compassion for people, is something we can learn. Humility and forgiveness are traits we can develop. The practices of prayer and worship can be cultivated within ourselves.

But what we need in order to do this is a teacher and an example to follow and Jesus offers to take on that role in our lives.

If we want to learn how to do something well in life, whether it be a craft or skill, then we frequently apprentice ourselves to a master.

I myself became a Chartered Accountant in the United Kingdom, not only through academic degrees but through being apprenticed for five years to a Master, in my case the master was a highly reputable and experienced partner in a nationally known accounting firm.

To be imbued with skills in life we need spend time with the master. We observe them. We let them instruct us and correct us. We seek to model ourselves after them. Craftsmen, artists, athletes, accountants and clergy alike we hone and perfect their abilities in this way.

The late Dallas Willard, a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California, also compared following Jesus to becoming the apprentice of a master.

He wrote "A disciple, or apprentice, is simply someone who has decided to be with another, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is."

So what do you do if you want to learn to live life well? Where do you go if you want to live in a way that corresponds to the way God created human beings to live? You seek out an example of a life that has been lived in that way.

This is what Jesus offers when he says, "Follow me".

In today's Gospel, when Jesus invited Philip to be his disciple, Philip gave no answer, rather he immediately committed himself to work for our Lord's mission .

So I ask the question for a second time... why do we follow Jesus?

In Philip's case, it appears that he was a quiet soul and is rarely mentioned in the Bible. Some scholars speculate that Philip was first a disciple of John the Baptist , because he lived in the region where John preached.

Like Peter and Peter's brother Andrew, Philip was a Galilean, from the village of Bethsaida. It's probable they knew one another and were friends.

It may well be that Philip did not feel appreciated in his life before he met Jesus. Quiet, non talkative folk.... such as Philip myself...and Father Rosa... perhaps on occasion feel alone and isolated.....hmmm we'll leave that comment alone...and move on..

Leaving his old life behind, Philip answered Jesus' call. He may have been among the disciples with Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana, when Christ performed his first miracle, turning water into wine.

Philip recruited the skeptical Nathanael (Bartholomew) as an apostle, leading Jesus to reveal that he supernaturally saw Nathanael sitting under a fig tree, even before Philip called him.

In the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus tested Philip by asking him where they could buy bread for so many people. Limited by his earthbound

experience, Philip replied that eight months' wages would not be enough to buy each person one bite.

The last we hear of Philip the Apostle is in the book of Acts, at Jesus' ascension and the Day of Pentecost. Tradition says Philip the Apostle preached in Phrygia, in Asia Minor, and was martyred there at Hierapolis.

Philip learned the truth about the kingdom of God at the feet of Jesus, then preached the gospel after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

Philip fervently sought the Messiah and recognized that Jesus was the promised Savior, even though he did not fully understand until after Jesus' resurrection.

Like the other apostles, Philip deserted Jesus during his trial and crucifixion . Some commentators give Philip a hard time...but quiet people often get misinterpreted. I know all about that....marrying into a Swedish family.

Starting with John the Baptist , Philip sought the path to salvation , which led him to Jesus Christ. Eternal life in Christ is available to anyone who desires it

So often, we think we can't tell other people about Jesus because we don't know enough or we don't know our Bibles well enough...but none of that matters. We don't need to be theologians to be effective. We just need to be passionate for Jesus, and he will do the rest!

So firstly, to be a follower of Jesus means to be found by him.

Secondly, to be a follower of Jesus means to tell others about him.

Thirdly, to be a follower of Jesus means keeping on going despite the hard knocks. Nathanael's response to Philip is not particularly encouraging, is it? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip had come running over to Nathanael, passionate about sharing this good news about Jesus, only to be met with a really cynical response.

Fourthly and finally: To be a follower of Jesus means receiving peace and blessing from God.

Sometimes, when we tell people about Jesus, we are met with cynicism or rudeness or apathy and it can be really discouraging and it can knock our self-confidence.

But when it happened to Philip, he didn't get into some theological debate about the merits of Nazareth as a geographical region or its place within the salvation history of Israel or anything like that...He just said to Nathanael, "Come and see!" And, when it comes to evangelism, that's all we need to keep saying: "Come and see!" We don't need to get involved in heavy theological debates. "Don't take my word for it. Come and see!" and let God do the rest.

Now, there is a real challenge to us here as a church because there is a rhetorical question for us to answer: if people do "Come and see", what will they find? Will people receive a warm welcome here? Will they get a sense of God changing lives? Will they have an experience of worship that gives them access to God? Will they go away with a sense of excitement that something is happening here? Is Jesus at the centre of Trinity ?

If they come and see us here, will they meet with God? All good questions for us to ponder as our Search and Future Mission Plan unfolds...

FinallyIn personal witness I can say that to have had the privilege to have attempted to follow Jesus in my life has brought me great challenges, great obstacles to overcome. It has brought me profound happiness and a template to follow till the day, hopefully when I am face to face with our Lord.

..... Amen.