

Dorset South and West Circuit
Service for Sunday 15 January 2023 by Tony Boyden

Theme: Come and see!

Today's passage from St John's Gospel tells us that the dynamic and very popular prophet, John the Baptist, acknowledges that Jesus is someone much greater than he could ever be. He has prepared the way and is now willing that his followers now adhere themselves to a new master who invites them to 'Come and see'.

Call to worship

Lamb of God, light of the nations, let us behold you in all your glory
Open our eyes, that we might see; our ears, that we might listen and our hearts that we may abide in you and you in us. Amen

Hymn: StF 233 When Jesus came to Jordan

1. When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptised by John ,
he did not come for pardon,
but as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence
with which good news begins.
3. Come Holy Spirit, aid us
to keep the vows we make;
this very day invade us
and every bondage break.
Come give our lives direction,
the gift we covet most:
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost.

2. He came to share temptation,
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began.

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Prayer of adoration and thanksgiving (*inspired by this morning's Gospel passage*)

We thank God for encouraging those like John the Baptist, who recognised the importance of Jesus' mission and encouraged people to become his followers.
We thank God for those people who, by their example, and their words, introduced us to Jesus and his way; God's love for all of us and his readiness to forgive us when we go astray.
We thank him too for the people who have shared their beliefs with us and patiently nurtured us in our faith.

Above all, we thank God for the good news that we are his children. **Amen**

A prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness

Lord, we ask you to forgive us for the times when our busyness lets you pass us by.
We ask you to forgive us for the times when we know you are there, but deliberately ignore you.
We ask you to forgive us for the times when we don't share you with our friends;

either because we lack confidence, or because we are just not excited enough by you. Lord, forgive us our darkness and fill us with your light.

We thank God that those who confess their sins will know God's forgiveness. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Lesson: John 1:29-42 NRSV

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Reflections : Come and See!

St John's Gospel tends to concentrate more on the great spiritual truths about Jesus than the other gospels. It plunges straight in. It begins with a description of Jesus as the source of life and of all things. He is the Light of humankind whom no darkness can overcome. And throughout the Gospel John leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is the Son of God.

So it's not really surprising that when John the Baptist meets Jesus it is described in terms of him being witness to the Lamb of God, Light of the World. The crowds who flocked to hear the Baptist asked him if he was Elijah or another prophet. He replied that he was merely the voice that was sent to announce the coming of the Messiah.

John's language is full of significance and meaning. We can see the 'lamb' as symbolising the gentleness and endearing approachability of Jesus. It can also, of course, suggest that Jesus's message is all about new life, new beginnings

Yet John's Jewish audience would also have quickly cottoned on to the idea of the Passover Lamb. In Exodus 12 we read how when God slayed the Egyptian first-born he was able to distinguish between the households of the Egyptians and Israelites because the Israelites sacrificed a lamb and sprinkled its blood on the doorposts. The blood of the lamb then was a symbol of belonging to God, of being protected by God and of being delivered by God. Just as the blood of the Passover lamb delivered the Israelites in Egypt from death, John is saying "here is the one who can deliver us from death to eternal life."

Both the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had visions of someone being brought as a lamb to

the slaughter; someone who by his sufferings and sacrifice, meekly and lovingly borne, would redeem his people with God. John the Baptist, would likely have known of these prophesies and was the first to foresee the outcome.

Suffice to say then that the simple phrase, “Lamb of God”, is pregnant with images- one who brings new life, the sacrifice for our sins, the suffering and conquering one – truly the one who takes away the sin of the world.

Then as John’s disciples follow Jesus, turns and says “what are you looking for?”, and they reply with what might seem a strange question, “Rabbi, where are you staying?”, and his equally oblique response was “come and see”.

Jesus’ question is the most fundamental question in life, what are you looking for? Were these would-be followers looking for a warrior messiah liberator or humbly and prayerfully seeking God?

By asking Jesus where he was staying the men were in effect saying, we don’t want to treat you as a passing acquaintance on the road, having a brief conversation. We want to come to learn from you, to get to know you, to spend serious time with you.

Jesus’ response- come and see- would be full of meaning when spoken by a Rabbi. It was a typical approach for a Rabbi not to present answers to people but to invite people to work together to see- discover- the answers for themselves.

Jesus met these would-be disciples half-way;; making things easier by being approachable. In other words God doesn’t stand at a distance, leaving us to continually seek and search for him. He makes himself open to us if we ourselves are open to and aware of the signs. And as followers of Christ we should emulate John the Baptist – to say ‘behold the lamb of God’, to point out the lamb and encourage others to follow.

It’s not so much about pressuring folk. People whose lives have been truly transformed by coming to faith haven’t been browbeaten by someone bellowing “If you were to die tonight, do you know where you will spend eternity?” It’s not our place to impose but to give the simple invitation: to come and see.

Now it can be difficult to share our faith with those who are not Christians; but it is down to us, in the words of one modern preacher, to “exercise our witnessing muscles”. Choosing our words can be difficult. It’s striking the right balance between over-powering enthusiasm on the one hand and a diffident, almost apologetic, lukewarm approach on the other.

A powerful message will stem from people witnessing our faith in action: in the way we reach out to the community through unconditional love; in how we make others welcome when they cross the threshold of the church and in the sense of wonder and excitement conveyed through our worship. Faith lived out authentically on a day-to- day basis can thus have the most telling impression on those we invite to come and see. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We come to you, Lamb of God. You are constantly at work in our lives and we look to you as a help in times of difficulty because you give us strength when we need it and guidance when we feel lost and alone.

We come to you, Lamb of God, because we know that you can transform lives, mend broken relationships, bring strength to the weary and hope to the broken-hearted.

We pray -

- for world leaders that they may resolve international conflict wherever it is and instead seek peace and security

- for countries laid waste by war and conflict and dictatorship and terrorism
- for a speedy return to normality in those communities and livelihoods devastated by adverse weather conditions; and a blessing on all those bringing succour and relief
- for the Church worldwide and particularly Christians who are suffering persecution and violence for their faith
- for those who have lost grip of their faith, having experienced sorrow and suffering
- for those struggling because of the hike in the cost of necessities; and for a blessing on those seeking to help them
- for those worried about their health and what the future might hold or feeling anxious and depressed or shouldering burdens they find impossible to share or mourning someone dear to their heart
- for ourselves that we might experience the gentle authority of Jesus in all parts of our lives: leading, guiding, encouraging and directing us. Amen

Lord's Prayer.

Our father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.
 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn: StF 556 Just as I am without one plea.

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| 1. Just as I am, without one plea but that you
died to set me free, and at your bidding,
'Come to me'
O Lamb of God, I come! | 2. Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict , many a doubt,
fightings within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come! |
| 3. Just as I am, you will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:
because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! | 4. Just as I am- your love unknown
has broken every barrier down-
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God I come! |
| <i>Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871)</i> | |

Blessing

Lord, you invited us to come and see
 and you opened our eyes to your wonders.
 May we be transformed by our encounter.
 and given the courage to go and tell,
 to share who you are with others we meet,
 so they too may be transformed by you. **Amen**