

Good news

14 January 2024

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

I wonder if you like fishing? Either off a jetty, or at the beach or in a boat? Some people just love to go fishing – they find it challenging and fun – whether or not they catch enough fish to eat for dinner.

I've never been much good at fishing ... but some people just know where the fish will be biting, what sort of bait to use, how to go about it ... like my brother in law Martin who not only studies fish for a profession but also is a darn good fisherman. Going fishing with Martin, even beginners like Liz and myself manage to catch a few fish.

In one of today's Bible readings, Jesus is walking along a beach and sees some fishermen at work. He invites them to go with him on a different kind of fishing trip, where they'll be fishing for people rather than fishing for fish.

Surprisingly, they drop everything and go with Jesus.

But perhaps there's more to this story than Mark tells us. The Gospel writer John presents this call story of the first disciples a little differently.

Let's listen to the two accounts.

BIBLE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet
a light to our path.

John 1:35-51

The next day John the Baptist was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'

They said, 'Rabbi, where are you staying?'

'Come, and you will see.' So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they spent that day with him.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And Andrew brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You

will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida in Galilee. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'

'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.

'Come and see,' said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.'

'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.'

Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.'

Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.' He added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'

Mark 1:14-20

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

May your word live in us,

and bear much fruit to your glory.

MESSAGE Good news

I wonder if you've had any **epiphanies** lately? An **epiphany** is the sudden **realisation** of something previously unknown or forgotten.

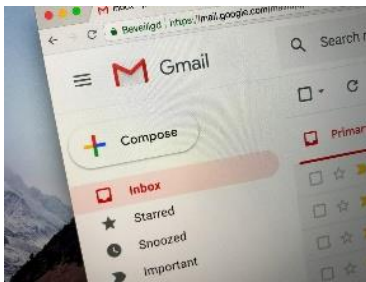
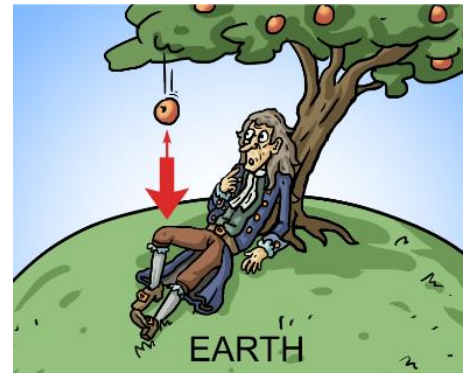
Scientists can have an epiphany – like when Isaac Newton saw an apple fall off a tree and realised that the apple – and the moon – were both affected by the same force, namely gravity.

So a famous scientific theory was born.

Sometimes you and I can have epiphanies about how to tackle an issue.

So a personal example. When Liz and I were heading off to NZ for my long service leave I realised that if it was to be a healthy break away from my normal ministry commitments, I had to make some changes.

Two things that often influence my daily routine are **time** and **emails**.



So when we went away, my watch stayed home and we never used a bedside clock. Just occasionally we had to set an alarm on the phone to wake us in time to make the start of a tour, but mostly we had no time related commitments and our days were not ruled by the clock.

I also stored away any church related emails and didn't look at them until this week. Thanks to Sue and Kathryn and others for deliberately taking me off some email circulation lists. While we were away, we also watched almost no TV. These changes meant that I didn't find out about some personal and world events until much later, but I wasn't in a position to do anything to help anyway. The result was that it was so much easier to focus on making the most of each and every day.

It also provided more space to hear from God.

In the church, we are currently in the **season of Epiphany**, which has a slightly different sense. The pivotal event is the **visit of the wise men** to Jesus bearing gifts. For the folk at Croydon, the lovely new banners and the way they are draped at the moment draw attention to this story.



The story appears only in Matthew's Gospel, but it shows how foreigners – the **magi** – who were probably astrologers – respond to a new sign in the sky and have the epiphany that the star marks the birth of a king. Hence they travel in search of this king and offer their worship and gifts to him. While King Herod and the authorities in Jerusalem seem to know or care very little about Jesus' birth, Gentiles from the East have an **epiphany** and go seeking for Jesus to worship him as a future king.



The next key day remembered in the church calendar after Epiphany is the **baptism of Jesus**, which I believe you remembered last week. Here there is another epiphany as **a voice speaks from heaven** that this Jesus is in fact **God's Son**, with whom God is well pleased. So Jesus is revealed as having a special and unique relationship with God.



The reading we heard from **John's Gospel** presents **this baptism epiphany** of Jesus in a slightly different way. John the Baptist claims that he is baptising people with water so that Jesus may be revealed to Israel through his witness, as he identifies Jesus as the one on whom the Spirit of God remains and names Jesus as the Lamb of God.



As the opening chapter in John's Gospel continues, the various characters then name Jesus as Rabbi meaning Teacher, Messiah or Christ or King of Israel, as Son of God and finally Jesus identifies himself as Son of Man.

So by the end of this first chapter of John's Gospel we know about the heavenly origin of Jesus, his special relationship with God and also many of the key titles bestowed on Jesus. The last verse of the chapter brings the story back to the beginning point of Jesus' heavenly origin when he says,

Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.

For those who know their OT well, this is a reference to the story in Genesis where Jacob has a dream and sees a ladder reaching up to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. God assures Jacob of his presence with and protection over Jacob. When Jacob wakes from the dream he says,

*How awesome is this place!
This is none other than the house of God (Bethel).
This is the gate of heaven.*

When Jesus quotes from this passage in Genesis he is effectively saying that he himself – rather than the house of Jacob – is the gateway or connection between earth and heaven, between humanity and God. The banners at Croydon help us imagine this link with the long piece of gold material.

During the last few weeks as we have celebrated Advent, Christmas, Epiphany and the baptism of Jesus, I wonder if you've had any epiphanies regarding Jesus?

Any new insights or forgotten things remembered as to who this Jesus is?



This opening chapter in John's Gospel also introduces another epiphany, another significant insight. Jesus will not operate on his own, but rather will invite and call others to journey with him. Unlike the rather abrupt way that the first disciples in Mark's Gospel are called – a story that we'll get to shortly – John suggests that this invitation to follow Jesus did not come entirely out of the blue.

Two disciples of John the Baptist hear him speaking about Jesus and are curious to find out more. One of the two is named as Andrew, while the second is often assumed to be John, the writer of John's Gospel. After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew goes and finds his brother Simon and introduces him to Jesus who promptly names him Peter.

Next day, Jesus invites Philip, a friend of Andrew, to follow him up to Galilee. Philip then goes and finds another friend, Nathanael and he too is introduced to Jesus.

All of this is remarkably normal. It's how relationships are established and built as

one person meets someone interesting and invites their friends to meet the person as well. There is a mix here of **natural curiosity, friendship and invitation**.

It remains the bedrock of how people come to know Jesus today, as we share something about our own faith in Jesus and how that brings purpose and hope and peace in our lives. If a friend shows interest or curiosity we can then point them towards Jesus by inviting them to church or suggest that they could read, perhaps, the Gospel of John or the Gospel of Mark as a way of meeting this person Jesus for themselves.

It's time to quickly turn over to Mark's Gospel, which is typically brief and fast-moving.

Jesus is **baptised**, is then driven into the wilderness by God's Spirit to be **tested** – a reading that is reserved for the first Sunday in Lent each year – before returning to Galilee and **preaching** a message of repentance, similar to the message of John. This message is characterised as 'good news' or gospel.



Jesus is then walking along Lake Galilee and sees two pairs of fishermen – Peter and Andrew – James and John – and calls each of them to follow him in a new calling – that of fishing for people. **Immediately** – a favourite word in Mark's Gospel – all four fishermen leave their nets and follow Jesus.



It all seems to happen a bit too fast to be believable, as if Jesus has cast a magic spell over them.

But that where John's account helps. If there was already a relationship with Jesus – at least for Andrew and John – and a previous encounter with Peter – and some presumed discussion amongst the four about who this Jesus might possibly be – then it makes more sense for them to decide to go with Jesus on his learn-as-you-go fishing adventure.

What matters is that they were willing to take the risk and step out into the unknown with Jesus. This was a decisive step but there would be many more challenges and decisions ahead of them as they continued to walk with Jesus. Similarly for us, there

may have been one decisive moment when we decided for ourselves to follow Jesus, but this initial step is just one on the lifelong journey of being a disciple of Jesus.

While we might feel more comfortable sticking with the fishing nets we know and the boats we've grown accustomed to over the years, Jesus still calls to us to follow him into new places and to try new things ... that's both the exciting but the scary part of following Jesus ... as the initial disciples found out.

SONG Will you come and follow me

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?

Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Words John L. Bell & Graham Maule © 1987 WGRG, Iona Community. Used with permission.