

Dear friends,

Another week passed! Another year settling into its rhythm – and may we all be able to settle long with it. Today we read John's testimony which has the hallmark of authority – but do we read it with the wisdom of hindsight? At the time might it not have seemed almost foolish for a group of people following one leader simply to go off and follow another whose only invitation is: 'Come and see'? Let's explore this together. Every blessing to each one of you – Margaret

Call to worship:

In God there is no darkness at all.

Creator God, you spoke and your word was life and light.

In Jesus Christ, your living Word, you sent light to the world.

You have named us and we are part of your light.

You call us to your work in the world – to carry the light.

You call us into growth, to become more than servants of the light, but to live as light.

We are one in the light of God for we stand in his light – we live in his light – we belong in the light of God, strong in his light where there is no darkness at all. Amen.

The words to 'Will you come and follow me' by John I. Bell [b. 1949] and Graham Maule [b.1958]

Singing the Faith 673

1 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 my life be grown in you and you in me?

2 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?

3 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?

4 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?

5 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.

Prayer including the Lord's Prayer

In all we do, you are present, Lord: in every thought and action, you wait for us to turn to you.

In everything we are, you are present, Lord: you fill us with good gifts – you inspire us to build and make – you know us and name us.

In our fear you shelter and support us. In danger you hold us in your hand. You prepare us for all that you set before us.

You love us in our weakness and fill us with your strength. You restore us and make us restorers of your people.

You give us each other, make us for love in the world. You never forget us, never abandon us.

In our foolishness and in our need you sent us Jesus Christ to live your life with us.

Through him we understand we are not separate from you – and through him we understand that we are not separate from one another.

Faithful God, you offer us your strength – you offer us new life – you offer us yourself and lift us to your heart and love us.

Faithful God, we give you thanks and praise, this day and for ever more. Amen.

Loving God, you made us in your loving light but everywhere we fill ourselves with the darkness of selfishness. Forgive our darkness and fill us with your light.

You made us to know you and to live in friendship with you but everywhere we turn our eyes from you, living blinkered lives, as if you were not present in the world. Forgive our darkness and fill us with your light.

You made us to be confident in your love for us, to know your protection and be fed by your strength – but everywhere we let ourselves be overwhelmed by fear. Forgive us our darkness. Fill us with your light.

You made us to see each other as your children, one family under heaven – but everywhere we are divided. Forgive us our darkness. Fill us with your light.

Loving God, forgive us the darkness of division – the darkness of fear – the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of desires which urge us to put our needs above the needs of others.

Forgive our darkness & fill us with your light, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of all that has been and all that is to be, your forgiveness and grace save us from shame and discouragement. Your healing light and understanding save us from sinking into darkness – and the life, death, resurrection of Jesus give us purpose, meaning and life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

John 1: 29-42 taken from The New Testament [a new translation] by William Barclay. Copyright William Barclay 1968.

Next day John saw Jesus coming towards him. 'Look!' he said. 'The Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world! It was of him I said, "A man is coming after me who ranks before me, for he existed before I was born." I myself did not know him, but the very reason I have come baptising with water is that he might be made plain for all Israel to see. I saw the Spirit,' John declared, 'coming down like a dove from heaven and settling on him. I myself did not know him. But it was he who sent me to baptise with water who said to me: "He on whom you shall see the Spirit coming down and settling is he who is to baptise with the Holy Spirit." I have seen it myself, and I now declare that this is the Son of God.'

Next day, when John was again standing with two of his disciples, he saw Jesus walking past. 'Look!' he said. 'The Lamb of God!'

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus turned and saw them following him. 'What are you looking for?' he said.

'Rabbi,' they said to him – the translation of the word Rabbi is Teacher – 'where are you staying?' 'Come and see,' he said to them. They came and they saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him for the rest of that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they met him.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two disciples who had heard what John said, and who had followed Jesus. The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon.

'We have found the Messiah,' he said to him. [The translation of the word Messiah is Christ]. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him. 'You are Simon, John's son,' he said to him. 'You will be called Cephas.' [Peter is the translation of Cephas.]

Meditation of Andrew – taken from A Most Amazing Man Year A written by Nick Fawcett Copyright 2010 Nick Fawcett

'Come and see,' he said, so we went to his lodgings and remained there the rest of the day, listening spellbound as he read the Scriptures and brought them to life.

The Lamb of God, John had dubbed him, and we soon realised why, for he taught unlike anything we'd heard before, with quiet authority, amazing insight and awesome wisdom – unfolding the law and the prophets so that they spoke not just of the past but of the present.

Clearly God was with him – but no, it was more than that: he was speaking *to* and *through* him, heaven somehow touching earth in his person – the divine there beside us.

Could it be, we wondered? Could he be the long-awaited Messiah, the one we'd all so longed to see? Surely so! And we rushed off finally to spread the news, to tell others of the one we'd found.

He told us to come – to see for ourselves – and, thank heaven, that is what we did.

We followed him home – and we're following still, for he has shown us the way to life.

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Lord Jesus Christ, help us to know you for ourselves – to make time each day to nurture a meaningful relationship, dependent not on what others have told us – on what we've learned second-hand – but on a personal encounter, an ongoing experience of your presence.

Draw near, and keep us close to you, now and always. Amen.

Comment: taken from Complete Common Worship – Sermon Illustrations by David Adam Copyright 2005,2006,2007,2011 David Adam

The day after the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and declared: 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' John witnesses to Jesus and to what happened at his baptism and he points people away from following him to follow Jesus. He wants people to know that following Jesus is of far greater importance because he is the Son of God.

The next day John was with two of his followers, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed:

'Look, here is the Lamb of God.' To describe Jesus in this way was to build on the promise of the Scriptures. Going right back to Genesis 22:8, Abraham said, 'God will provide a lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' In doing this, and staying Abraham's hand, God rescued Isaac from death. The Passover Lamb [Exodus 12: 1-13] celebrates the gaining of freedom from slavery and even from death. In Isaiah, the Suffering Servant, whom the Christian Church sees as an image of Jesus, is described as 'a lamb led to slaughter' [Isaiah 53:7].

The effect of John the Baptist's words was for two of his followers to leave him and follow Jesus. As ever with seekers, they are met by the one they seek. Jesus turns to meet them. St Augustine said that we cannot even begin to seek God unless he has already found us. When we seek God, we do not go to one who hides from us but to one who has always been seeking us and comes to meet us. Jesus asks: 'What are you looking for?' This is a good question to ask all of us: is it knowledge, security, meaning, a purpose, peace – or is it a relationship with the living God? When the disciples ask: 'Where are you staying?' Jesus invites them: 'Come and see.' The only real way to truly learn of Jesus is to abide in his presence, to stay with him. Faith is not about believing in facts: it is having a living relationship with Jesus. As an interesting aside, we are told that it was about four o'clock in the afternoon. Could it be that the writer of the Gospel remembered this well and that this disciple was John who would witness to Jesus through the Gospel and, in this way, point people to Jesus? The other disciple was Andrew and the first thing he did after meeting Jesus was to go and tell his brother: 'we have found the Messiah' – that is, the Christ, the Anointed One. Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Later it was Andrew who would bring the boy with the five barley loaves to Jesus. Later still, he would bring a group of Greeks to Jesus. Andrew is seen as the first missionary in bringing someone to Jesus. What greater service can you do than bring someone to Jesus?

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It is often proclaimed that the Church is suffering from a crisis in the West – a shortage of priests, a shortage of ministers as we know only too well in this Circuit – but more clergy, more money won't solve the crisis. The Church needs a dose of Andrews! It needs people who will abide with Christ and then bring others to him. The Church is not short of people, and it could grow like it did of old if we would learn to abide with Christ & seek to bring others to him. The Church grew from 12 disciples who were with Jesus & who wanted others to know him. We must learn to bring others to the One we know and love. Just think how quickly the Church would grow if we were all committed to bringing someone else to know Jesus. *[Think of the hymn, 'I, the Lord of sea and sky' by Daniel L. Schutte. StF 663]*

Prayer:

God, who made the world: shaped me, filled me with life and talents. God made me as part of a network of love which keeps the world alive. God knows the name of my heart, my true name, the name that links me to God – the name that says who I truly am. My name lives in the mind of God just as I live in the mind of God. God gave me my self and I try to give myself back to God – to use the freedom I have to choose God – to place myself in his hands, trusting myself to his love and mercy – trying to fill my life with him by giving my life to him and acknowledging that God who made the world made me. I give thanks for my place in God's world. Amen.

Close: As we go on into the week, may we see more of who God is.

May we be ready to listen to the word of Jesus and may we have the courage to say to others: 'come and see'. Amen.

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