



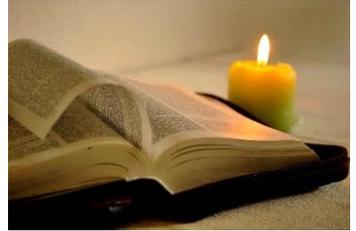
The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

2nd May 2021

The paper-version Service

To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.



Opening Prayer Almighty God, Heavenly Father we give you thanks for the life and light you lavish upon us. Help us to walk in this life and light. Forgive us for all our many failures; for the times when we have chosen darkness and stepping out of your light brought grief to others and ourselves. Thank you that your kindness that leads us to turn again and follow Jesus. Help us to come to you with openness of hearts and hands to receive your grace, your life, your light, and be those who draw others to you. **Amen**

Song:

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen
One
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life
–
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.

Read: John 1:35-50.

God invites. *A summary of the talk given by Rob Hughes.*

Here, in a reflection entitled 'God Invites' we look at John's Gospel, Chapter 1 verses 35-50, perceiving that 'God is doing a New Thing'. It's part of a new series of sermons inspired by the Gospel of John.

What are we seeing in this passage? That is always the question. But in this case, it's not rhetorical. From one perspective, perhaps our own, Jesus has come recruiting, to establish a 'church', to gather a team. But who is he likely to meet here? There's nothing remotely 'team' about John the 'baptiser'! He's out and out 'anti-establishment' - a man literally in the wilderness.

The baptiser says we're all going to hell on a handcart; that the world is lost; we don't even understand life - far less God! And he doesn't care who's listening. Yet even to the more cynical, it's a refreshingly honest, persuasive way to talk - and rather disturbing! So we listen. We might think lots of people have the gift of the gab. Yet somehow the words filling the air around us today have new power. Maybe the world is changing after all. Who knows?

Here, close to a Dead Sea and the desiccated caves of Qumran, far from the fertile 'Sea of Galilee', we encounter two unlikely commentators. One, a curiously

scruffy desert 'John' - already achieving notoriety - the other, an unknown carpenter's son from the provincial backwater of Nazareth.

In v46 Nathaniel asks: "Can anything good come from there?" To which Philip replies: "Come and see!"

We are located, as v28 says, in Bethany. But not the pretty village by the Mount of Olives. We are at Perea, close to Al-Maghtas, a long trek from 'civilised normality'. And the people here must be VERY 'interested'. Because you definitely wouldn't come out of idle curiosity. And that, perhaps, is the point: 'Seeing' is evidently worth the effort.

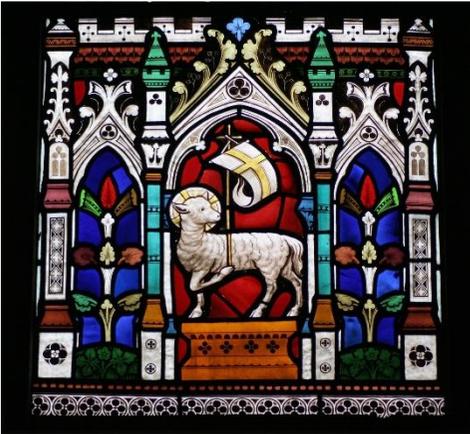
But seeing is not always understanding. Teachers are needed. And in those days, they were priests and scribes. It was acknowledged to be a sacred task - explaining God's laws to the people. Yet scribes were often notaries, too; or lawyers, or secretaries in wider society, pillars of the 'establishment'. So, unlike our two free-speaking commentators, they were unlikely to encourage controversy. At almost the outset, then, John's Gospel hints that troubles lie in wait.

What we are seeing, gathered around the 'baptiser', is a real thirst for knowledge of God. And it's bringing-in people from far and wide. They're not gullible and neither are they obsessively religious; more probably

they're just plain world-weary, and, like the rest of us, longing for 'good news'. Well, we all need hope; we want to believe there's a point to life; that we have real value and a kindly purpose.

Did you notice all the names people gave Jesus in the passage?

- The Lamb of God
- Rabbi
- Messiah
- The Jesus of Moses the Law and the Prophets
- Son of God
- King of Israel



They are strikingly different. What did you make them? How do we describe Jesus? Some say only scripture tells us. So, is it scripture that John and Jesus bring to this out-of-the-way place?

The verses we read today, give a 'muscular' account, credibly detailed rather than being in any way abstract. We can almost 'experience' the

events John writes about. And I am brought to wonder how muscular, (practical - as opposed to theoretical) my belief in Jesus is? James says in his book (1:22) says: 'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.' But what is that?

'Come and see' says Philip. Those two powerful verbs announce we will not understand (we will not see) unless we come. But do we need to 'come' to him to see; after all, now we can look elsewhere, to church, for example. So why take the inconvenient trip out into wilderness when so much 'good-news', is set before us on a plate every Sunday?

To put it quite simply, the answers to all our questions are contained by the invitation: 'Come' (to Jesus) 'and see': 'See', because 'seeing' IS 'understanding', and 'Come' because we have to come (to follow Jesus), each one of us - in order to be where Jesus is. For, in matters of faith, proximity IS knowledge, learning by being there - in lived experience. Only when I have 'come' to Jesus will I see the world as Jesus sees it; understand it as Jesus understands it, and respond in the way He responds.

So here, at last in Jesus, we have someone to whom we can come expecting to SEE and be seen! Behold! A new work is at hand! Thanks be to God.

Prayers: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.

Collect: 5th Sunday of Easter. Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The 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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**



Blessing: God the Father, by whose love Christ was raised from the dead, open to us who believe the gates of everlasting life. God the Son, who in bursting the grave has won a glorious victory, give us joy as you share the Easter faith. God the Holy Spirit, whom the risen Lord breathed into his disciples, empower you and fill us with Christ's peace. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

The Notices: We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends, or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.

