

John 1:29-42 John's testimony and his disciples

Imagine a busy street scene. There are people busily trotting by, on their way to buy groceries or deliver goods, breeders taking livestock to the temple for sacrifice, children darting to and fro, some stopping to chat with a friend, some walking deep in conversation, some deep in thought.

A travelling preacher is holding forth. He is enthralling, charismatic. He's been living in the desert, eating insects and wild honey, he wears scratchy camel hair clothing, he speaks uncomfortable truths about sin and repentance, and offers a soaking in the river Jordan as a way of showing remorse for sin and declaring a new devotion to God. People gather round to listen to him. He's beginning to attract the attention of the authorities. Is he a prophet? Elijah? He is quite definite, quoting Isaiah,

"I am the voice of someone shouting in the desert: 'Make a straight road ready for the Lord.'"

More people come to listen to him, and he begins to tell them about the person who will come next, the son of God. On cue, Jesus appears. Another travelling preacher? But this one is more than charismatic. This one is different, riveting, compelling, fascinating. He has an air of extraordinary intensity, unassailable power, and immense compassion.

John our passionate baptiser, recognises him straight away and yells, 'this is the one!' And explains how he knows. The dove, the voice of God. This is the man who will come after him but is so, so much greater than him. This is the Son of God.

The next day, Jesus comes by again, and John points him out to his followers.

And he calls him a lamb.

A lamb? A lamb for sacrifice in the temple? This child of God? This man of infinite power? How can that possibly be right? But John has seen the vision. He knows that Jesus has come to save, to take away the sins of the world, as a true

sacrifice. John knows that Jesus is the lamb, who will die willingly, when he has no sin, and on behalf of all those ordinary souls who so need God's forgiveness.

John's followers are drawn to Jesus and ask him where he's staying. They're not asking if he's staying at Claridge's or the Premier Inn! They want to know where to find him, whenever they should need to be near him. They can't resist the need to be near him. Jesus knows. He invites them to come along. And Andrew just has to run and fetch his brother, Simon, to meet Jesus as well.

Jesus knows who this is. He names him Peter, the Rock. Glad to welcome him. Knowing the work he has planned for Peter. In time.

Let's return to my image of a busy street. The people rushing, strolling, playing, working, and John preparing the way, and Jesus passing by.

Who do you identify with in that picture? Are you busy on a new project? Is work taking up every waking moment? Is retirement just a joy, filled with favourite hobbies? Are you enjoying catching up with friends, or relaxing, or absorbed in thought? Do you struggle to resist Facebook or Insta? Is it frustrating how people dawdle when you're on a mission?

How are you feeling about your faith at the moment?

Maybe you're feeling unsure or unhappy and could do with some advice or reassurance. ...Like the people who stopped and listened to John.

Is it difficult to believe that God would sacrifice his own son for you, personally? Do you wonder how Jesus could be used like a lamb in the temple?

Have you had a moment when you have realised that God is there for you? ...like the people who crowded round John waiting to be baptised.

Did your faith grow quietly and almost unnoticed? And is it now strong, like John the Baptist himself? Could you be the one to point Jesus out to a friend?

Are you drawn irresistibly to God? Are you longing to spend more time with him? .. like John's followers who went to talk with Jesus. Could you be the one to run and fetch your brother to meet him too?

Do you find it hard to talk about Jesus? Is it easier to listen?

What should we do? Who can we turn to?

First the most important answer: God is here, now, waiting to hear from us. All we need to do is PRAY!

There is a complementary solution: (also recommended by Jesus: in John 13:34-35, this taken from the Message

³⁴⁻³⁵ “Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.”)

Look round. Our Church community is charged with caring for one another. Amongst us here and now or at home watching on YouTube, are the people who can share God’s gifts with each other, and bounce them out to other people on the street and across the world.

There is someone who would love to encourage you if you’re wavering or worried, someone who would love to share how they came to know Jesus, someone who would love to listen to whatever you’re worried about, someone who has words when you don’t, someone who would love to read the Bible or pray with you.

Incidentally, if you’re wondering if you’re up to offering any help, you don’t need to be professionally qualified, or on a rota. You don’t need to be feeling 100% yourself before you can offer help to someone else!

Let’s just do what we can. After all, all we have to do is ask, Jesus is ready and knows what we need and what work he has ready for us to do.

Fleur Pelly, 15 Jan 2023