



“Come and See” (and Bring a Friend)

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Epiphany 2

Isaiah 49:1-7

Joy Cowley, Aotearoa Psalms #39

John 1:29-42

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At the beginning of a new year, many of us make New Year resolutions! Some of them are big and potentially life changing, like this is the year when I join a housing project for the poor, or get a new job, and some are smaller like I’m going to look after a grandchild once a week. But big or small they reflect the hope we have for life in the new year.

If we’re lucky, we’ve survived those hopeful days of resolutions without feeling we’ve failed before the year has really begun; survived that brief, hopeful period when we are convinced that *this* will be the year we become better people through cutting out sugar, counting steps, or colour-coding our calendars. By about now, most of us will have renegotiated those hopeful ambitions into something more realistic, like “being kinder to ourselves” or “not buying quite so many books we don’t read.”

Today’s Gospel feels surprisingly appropriate for this moment. John’s Gospel opens not with a miraculous birth story, there isn’t one in John’s gospel, but rather with a different beginning for Jesus, a more realistic introduction to who John, the writer, hopes we will understand Jesus to be. He presents Jesus to us at the commencement of his work, with a series of introductions and actions— with people doing something: seeing, pointing, noticing, asking, and tentatively following. No big commitments. Just curiosity and movement – movement toward. After all Epiphany, the liturgical season we are now in, is the season of revelation, the season of noticing, of revealing, of unexpected insight and understanding, of seeing anew!

John the Baptist sees Jesus and says, “Here is the Lamb of God.” Now, that phrase can sound heavy at this time of year; heavy with centuries of theology probably almost enough turn us off. What matters most for us today is not the theology shaped by the ‘church Fathers’ beginning sometime after the 4th C, or

the label John attaches to Jesus but the gesture: John points away from himself. He refuses to be the centre of attention. His role is to say, *“Look over there. He points away from himself.”*

That is a good message for the church to hear as it sets out on another year! It reminds us we are not here to draw attention to ourselves — our traditions, our certainty, or our moral superiority. We are here to point toward life, toward love, toward justice, toward the life-giving impetus we glimpse in Jesus. We are here to point away from ourselves to the Good News of God at work in the world. Then, as John develops his story to tell us who Jesus is, we are told two of John’s disciples do something very brave and very human: they seem to have got caught up in what Jesus was saying. Something caught their attention, or imagination, and leave what they know (they’ve been followers of John the Baptist) and follow Jesus.

When Jesus senses they are following him, Jesus turns and asks them a question that sits at the heart of the Christian life.

For me the question relates to the impetus for making New Year Resolutions - *What do you think the question is?*

It is **“What are you looking for?”**

It is not: *What do you believe?*

not: *Are you morally pure?*

not: *Do you have your theology sorted out?*

Just: *What are you looking for?*

This is I think a very poignant question when we remember the context into which John was speaking, in that last decade of the first century, when all was in turmoil in Jerusalem and the surrounding region. When there was bloodshed, despair, disowning and isolating, when it was difficult to hold on to hope in the face of it all. It was a great question for John to put before the Jesus followers who were hoping and expecting change and perhaps even hoping for Jesus to return and make everything right.

So *“What are you looking for?”* is a wonderfully gentle question for the start of a new year.

It encourages us to look within and weigh up what it is that is really important to us.

It doesn’t lay any expectations or demand any allegiance. It just asks us to examine our inner thoughts and our hopes.

The power of agency remains with us; we can determine

what it is that will motivate us,
what our values are,
what is important to us.

It really is a great question at the beginning of a new year. After all, *what are we actually seeking – what are we looking for?* Peace? Meaning in our life? Healing? Belonging? Is it a way to live that doesn't burn us out or harden our hearts? Is it a faith that makes room for doubt and still calls us toward justice?

The disciples, annoyingly, don't give an answer to Jesus' question (that could have been helpful). Instead, they ask a question of him in return. They say, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" It's a practical question. Almost awkward as if they were caught off guard and couldn't think of anything cleverer. And Jesus replies with one of the most open-ended invitations in the gospels.

"Come and see."

Not: *Come and sign up.*

Not: *come and I'll give you a job*

Not: *Come and agree with everything.*

Just: *Come and see.*

*(It's quite a familiar approach of Jesus in John's narrative. At the end of Advent we had a reading also from John's gospel in which Jesus told his friends and followers to **go and tell John the Baptist what they had seen!** "Report what you see and hear" not what is said!*

Now it is just **"come and see"**

At St Matthew's we declare we are shaping a progressive theology. And Progressive theology often begins right here: faith as invitation: *come and see*, not coercion.

Progressive theology is a journey, not instant certainty. It is curiosity, not fear. Jesus does not demand clarity from his disciples before their relationship can develop; clarity grows *through* their relationship. And we can testify to that if we think about how we come to an understanding.

And then something else happens that prefigures what happens today as we build relationships around our story of faith. Andrew, one of the two who, according to the writer of John's Gospel, first followed Jesus, goes and finds his brother Simon and says, "We have found the Messiah." Notice what he does not do: he does not explain the doctrine of incarnation or outline a theory of atonement. He simply brings Simon to Jesus to see for himself.

Growing the community of the faithful around Jesus is, in this story, not about pressure or persuasion. It's relational, it's about seeing together something new, something different, something that brings hope, something you can work for. It's about sharing something that has already changed you, even if you can't quite explain how. Movements for positive social change that are life giving function this way too – they are relational.

Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga, and the Living Wage Movement, both movements of social change aimed at addressing social injustice and enabling people to engage effectively in civil society, are movements built on relationships that grow this way. ‘Come and see’ we might say, come and see if this fits with the vision you have for our neighbours and our country.

When Simon arrives, Jesus does something a bit strange, yet on reflection is deeply affirming if slightly unsettling: he gives him a new name. “You are Simon... you will be called Cephas.”

This is not about erasing who Simon is, but about seeing who he might become. Epiphany is a season of revelation — not only about who Jesus is, but also about who we are becoming in relationship with him.

At the start of a new year, that matters. Many of us carry labels we’ve been given — by family, by church, by society, by our own inner critics. Some of those names no longer fit. We hope to see beyond them, not with judgment, but with possibility - our new year resolutions reflect this - and we invite others to see beyond them too, to see what might be possible.

So perhaps the invitation of this text is simple and spacious:

listen again for the question, *“What are you looking for?”*

trust an invitation that says, *“Come and see.”*

share faith not as certainty, but as relationship.

And allow ourselves — and one another — to be named by hope rather than fear.

Epiphany reminds us that God is still being revealed, not just in ancient stories, but in ordinary encounters: a conversation, a question, a small decision to follow what leads toward life.

May this be a year when we resist worrying that we don’t have everything sorted and instead choose to stay curious; and when we paint ourselves as failures because we didn’t fulfil our New Year resolutions, allow them instead to remind us from time to time what we hoped for.

May we like John, point, toward love and the life-giving move toward justice making, rather than pointing to ourselves and the limits of our certainties. And may we hear Jesus’ invitation again — gently, patiently, joyfully:

Come and see.