

Trinity 1, 18/06/2017 6.30 St Peter's

Ministry must be getting serious – even in this parish with quite a few priests around, today I was preaching this morning, then had a baptism to take, and now I'm back with another sermon for evensong.

Standard practice might be to pretty much regurgitate the same sermon from the morning in the evening, perhaps with a few tweaks, perhaps a bit shorter.

But I don't want to just do that, because there's a very important aspect of this week's topic that didn't really get much of a mention, except very indirectly, this morning.

As I said this morning, this week is the second week of a cross-parish sermon series, on Discipleship. Last week was about 'stepping out of the boat' – which is also the overall title of the series. This week the theme is 'Come and see'.

This morning I looked particularly at the reading from John's gospel, and talked about what it means for *us* to 'Come and see' – the many different ways Jesus calls different people, sometimes very directly, but very often through the witness of intermediaries. Both approaches can be found in the gospel we just heard from John. The key point is that it is always Jesus who calls, and we can't predict or control what that call will be in our lives; but we can respond to Jesus' invitation, and follow where it leads.

So most of what I said this morning was about how *we* meet Jesus, how *we* 'Come and see'. This evening I want to focus a bit more on the second part of this, another part of our

response: the part where we invite other people to ‘Come and see’, and what that is all about.

I’m going to go off on what might seem like a bit of a tangent here. One of the questions you get asked a lot as part of the process of ‘discernment’, if you think you might have a vocation to ordination, is what part of the Anglican tradition you belong to. As someone raised a Roman Catholic – I didn’t join the Church of England till I was 33 – this was a bit of a poser, but early on I decided my answer was ‘I represent the Dominican tradition in the Church of England’. At first I thought this was quite a flippant answer, but I’ve found that this is a much better answer than I maybe thought it was to start with, so it’s an answer I’m going to stick with.

What has that got to do with this week’s theme? A key phrase in the Dominican tradition is *contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere*. Latin because of course the Dominicans originate from before the Reformation. It roughly translates as: ‘to contemplate and to hand on to others the fruits of contemplation’ – which maybe still makes the phrase quite elevated. But at root it’s exactly what today’s theme is about. *Contemplare* could be paraphrased as ‘Come and see’: come and see for yourself, encounter Jesus. *Et contemplata aliis tradere* could be paraphrased as: encourage other people to ‘Come and see’ what you have discovered.

Over the years, I’ve become more and more convinced that the Dominicans, at as they were originally, would see very much eye to eye with many modern-day evangelicals, pioneer ministers and the like, and that they would approve some of the basic ideas underpinning things like Alpha, so it’s

not really too fanciful to link their *contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* with Alpha's 'Come and see'.

So the two movements involved in today's theme have long belonged together: 'Come and see' for yourself, and encourage others to 'come and see' what you have discovered.

There might be a danger this could become an unhealthy power dynamic. We could think we have 'come and seen', that we have learnt what it's all about, so the second part of the movement is where we, controlling the knowledge, insist that others must take that knowledge from us and understand it in the same way we do. But this doesn't work at all, because, as I emphasised this morning, what we are 'contemplating' is always Christ, even the call to engage in that contemplation comes from Christ himself. When we encourage others to 'Come and see', we are encouraging them to meet Christ for themselves. We can never control or predict what comes out of the meeting.

Two final points. One is about accepting Jesus' call on other people. The reading from John today gives us a good illustration of this. The reading starts with 'two disciples', unnamed. We discover one of them is Andrew. These have been following John, and in this story are the first disciples then to go over to Jesus. But they don't thereby have particular status or end up being the ones particularly close to Jesus. Andrew introduces his brother Simon to Jesus: and the rest is history, Peter becomes the leading figure amongst the disciples. When other people become Christians, we should welcome what Jesus does in their lives.

The other point is that it's very liberating and encouraging for us to realise that it doesn't all depend on us, it isn't about what we know or do: our job is only to make it possible, as best we can, for people to meet Jesus, following Jesus' lead in that too. The rest is in *His* hands, and he knows people far better than we do and even than they know themselves, and will call them in his own good time. So there's no reason to be nervous about inviting people to 'Come and see'. It should be natural to us that we want to share this faith we have, honestly and freely, but there are many ways of doing so: ask Jesus to guide you in this, and follow where he leads.