
Sunday 17 January – Second Sunday of Epiphany

Readings: Revelation 5:1-10 & John 1:43-50

Revelation 5:1-10

The scroll and the Lamb

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying:

'You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.'

John 1:43-50

Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.'

'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.' Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.' Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.'

Reflection

Have you ever struggled to recognise someone you know well, because something about their appearance has changed? Many years ago, we were attending a family wedding, one of my cousins- my second cousin once removed if I've got that right. David and I, my sister and her husband and my mum and dad were sitting in a pew alongside each other, when a chap came and sat on the end of the row next to us. It wasn't until we left at the end of the service that I realised it was my brother, with a beard, and minus his glasses as he was wearing contacts. I truly didn't recognise him!

We're still in the season of Epiphany, which is all about recognising that in Jesus of Nazareth we come face to face with God, and early in John's gospel there are a series of stories about people who come to see something of who Jesus is, though their journeys are all different. The Magi start with a wandering star, the shepherds with a flock of angels. For John the Baptist his epiphany comes with a falling dove, and for Andrew and Simon Peter it is at the fishing docks. As Christians we believe that the Lord is always present with us, but the challenge can be for us to recognise the ways, the situations, and the people he is choosing to encounter us through. Epiphanies are transformative. Do we recognise who Jesus is, and do we notice

encounters with him in our daily lives, or do we miss the signals, the signs of his presence with us?

In our gospel reading Nathanael has such an epiphany. He comes across as a somewhat surly character, doubting that anything good could come out of Nazareth, and suspicious when Jesus first greets him. But the dramatic change in his character after the fig-tree moment comes as he proclaims Jesus to be Rabbi, the Son of God and King of Israel! As Rabbi, Jesus brings us teaching. As Son of God, he bridges the gap between God and humanity to show us who God is, and as King of Israel, he brings justice. So Nathanael's epiphany brings about a dramatic change as this sceptic is the first in John's gospel to confess Jesus as Son of God.

But there is a further revelation in that obscure reference at the end of the reading as Jesus refers to the heavens opening and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. What does this mean? This is a reference back to Genesis 28:10-19, and recalls Jacob's dream of a ladder stretching from heaven down to earth in a place he named Bethel, which means the House of God, or the place where God dwells. So Jesus is also a place where God dwells, and is the one who is to bridge that gap between heaven and earth, between God and humanity.

So Jesus is Rabbi, Son of God, King of Israel and the place where God dwells. Two further pictures of who Jesus is come out of our first reading from Revelation. Firstly, Jesus is the Lion of Judah, the only one who can open God's scroll that contains his rescue plan for creation. This is an allusion back to Genesis 49:9 where God chooses Judah's family line to be the one that would produce Israel's line of Kings and the promised Messiah. So Jesus as King is all powerful. But secondly he is also the Lamb, the sacrificial lamb, put to death on the cross to buy us back for God.

Many people in Jesus' day did not recognize who Jesus was, because he did not come with a roar, destroying his enemies and creating a kingdom by brute force. Rather, he appeared in weakness and human frailty and then died in apparent helplessness. He is the victorious Lamb who shows himself to us in ways we least expect. We all need more of God in our lives. Let us all invite God to give us an epiphany, to show himself to us right in the middle of our ordinary everyday routines, so that we might be transformed and equipped to love him and each other to our full potential.

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