



## Sermon: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany John 1. 43 – 51

January can be tough. The cold, dark days after the expectations and disappointments of Christmas, and the return to routine which may be burdensome or lonely can feel hard in a normal year: and this is not a normal year. In the midst of another lockdown we are all struggling.

The season of Epiphany, the time between the festival that remembers the coming of the Magi to visit the infant Jesus and the festival that remembers Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the Temple for dedication, seems right for us just now.

It is an honest season, with stories that recognise pain and struggle; a season that moves our attention from the cradle to the cross; a season that gives space for exploring what the story of Christmas means in the every day. The season of Epiphany is the time to discover whether the Kingdom of God, made flesh in the Christ child, is good news for all.

Our gospel reading today introduces us to Philip who did discover in Jesus the life-giving love of the Kingdom. Let's look at his story and see what we can learn:

1) "*Jesus found Philip*" we're told. The Greek suggests that Jesus sought Philip out rather than he just bumped into him. Here is the source of real life-giving love – Jesus seeks us out. The 1<sup>st</sup> letter of John reminds us "*In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to save us*". Jesus birth is God, in love, coming to find us.

You know my desire for you: that we know we are loved beyond measure by Jesus, and, assured by the hope that gives us, we have the courage to love without restraint for Jesus' sake.

As the 1<sup>st</sup> letter to John says, "*we love because God first loved us*".

2) Then we read: 'Jesus said to Philip, "*Follow me*".

The life-giving love of Jesus does not leave us where we are. Love demands something of us. When I'm asked why I'm a Christian, this is my answer: I realised, as an 11 year old child turning up on my own to a village church in north Derbyshire, that Jesus loved me so much that he gave everything for me – what could I do but give everything of myself in return?

Life-giving love is costly. When I came to be Bishop here an old friend sent me a card with this poem by Sidney Royse Lysaght, called

The Penalty of Love:

If love should count you worthy, and should deign  
One day to seek your door and be your guest,  
Pause! ere you draw the bolt and bid him rest,  
If in your old content you would remain.  
For not alone he enters: in his train  
Are angels of the mists, the lonely quest,  
Dreams of the unfulfilled and unpossessed.  
And sorrow, and life's immemorial pain.



He wakes desires you never may forget,  
He shows you stars you never saw before,  
He makes you share with him for evermore,  
The burden of the world's divine regret  
How wise were you to open not!--and yet,  
How poor if you should turn him from the door.

3) You may be familiar with the passage from 1 Corinthians which describes love:

*“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things“*

Philip met that love in Jesus, who sought him out in the specifics of his life in Bethsaida among his friends- Andrew, Peter, - and that love began its work in him. Love began to work generously – Philip sought out his friend Nathaniel to introduce him to Jesus too. Life-giving love, like fresh water, needs to flow. Love must be shared. We cannot speak life- giving love and not be prompted to act in love. In that way love is prophetic turning words and ideas into action.

4)Philip’s action was rooted and identified though. Philip wanted to give away the best of what he had, the best of what his experience, tradition, community, had to offer. Philip gave reason and name to what prompted his loving action – *“We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”*

Life-giving love is seen in evangelism as well as pastoral care and social, prophetic action.

5)Nathanael said to Philip, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’, but Philip was not put off. Learning from Jesus himself, Philip’s love kept no record of wrong, nor was resentful or coercive – *“Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ “*

A generous faith in Jesus’ life-giving love without measure for us, gives us the courageous hope, to love without restraint for Jesus sake – we need not be afraid of failure, or ridicule, or rejection – but be ready, having accepted Jesus invitation ourselves *“Follow me”*, to extend the offer of life to others *“Come and see”*.

That passage from 1 Corinthians concludes: *“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”*

The Kingdom of God is good news for all.

As we respond to our call to service in that Kingdom, through transformed lives in growing church and building community, we too will be characterised by generous faith, courageous hope

– and life-giving love.

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