



Pass it On (John 1:19-51)

In the last couple of weeks the BBC has been running a few programmes about the premiership of Margaret Thatcher to go with a play about her life they have made. I watched one of the documentaries the other night which showed the day of her resignation in November 1990. It's one of those days in history that if you were there you remember because of the speed at which she resigned. I was sitting in the Staff Common Room at College on a coffee break when the news came through and we watched a tearful Mrs Thatcher being whisked away. I remember the College Principal saying "this is the sort of day where you'll remember where you were when the news broke". And it was. We were witnesses to an event in history.

It's exactly the same whenever something good happens, particularly if it is to us. We can't wait to tell someone. Or if something important or even tragic happens, we also usually want to talk about it. We are witnesses and we pass on our experiences. Sadly it's only those things that we don't think are very important that we can't be bothered to tell people about. After all, when was the last time you talked with enthusiasm about the brand of mop you clean the floor with? They may do it in adverts – but never in real life!

Over the next few sermons that I do, we shall be exploring some of the ways in which people come to faith in Christ. The reason I am doing it is that often how we think people come to Christ isn't what actually happens in reality. To do this I am going to use what we learn through God's Word and see how that actually matches actual experience. To give you a hint, it matches really rather well, but I don't think that should come as a surprise if you are a Christian!

So here we are at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. How did people get to know Jesus? Let's find out as we look at the three stories in this chapter 1 of John's gospel

◆ John the Baptist's Story

Here we have this great figure, John the Baptist. When you talk about sharing the Good News about Jesus, he's the sort of guy we most associate with people coming to Christ. Here he was calling upon people to turn from their sins and walk God's way because the Messiah was coming. And people did. So much so that the traditional religious leaders sent a delegation to find out if he was the Messiah and he confirmed he wasn't but that he was the forerunner that prophesied in scripture.

Then the next day John sees Jesus and immediately says "There He is – it's Him – He's the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" It's interesting how John presents Jesus. He's excited. There was an enthusiasm in his voice, an excitement in his discovery. He bears witness to something that happened when he was baptising Jesus. He's recalling it but it seems that the baptism had happened since his discussion with the religious leaders on the previous day.

John witnessed something happening: And John gave this testimony: *"I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. 33 I still did not know that he was the one, but God, who sent me to baptise with water, had said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.'* 34 *I have seen it," said John, "and I tell you that he is the Son of God."* John was a man who knew God's word (he knew he was the Forerunner) listened to God's voice and most of all had experienced God's power as he baptised Jesus – and being a witness – he passed it on!

And the next day he sees Jesus again and says again: “There He is – it’s Him – He’s the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” and two of his disciples hear and follow Jesus. What about all the other people around when John said this? We don’t know – all we do know is that we get to day 3 and for two of his disciples the penny drops and they decide to follow Jesus. The Bible is full of testimony about Jesus – far more than John had at his disposal. So what was it that made Andrew and friend follow when others at that point obviously didn’t. I’d suggest two things. Firstly it was John’s testimony – he had witnessed something amazing of God and he told others. Secondly these men were John’s disciples. They knew him. They trusted him. They knew God was speaking through him – so they believed him and followed Jesus.

Look at any survey done of new converts and you’ll find few convinced of following Jesus just because of the words of a preacher, but by the words of someone they trust and who they know have experienced and authentic encounter with Jesus – and they want it for themselves.

When people look at our lives and hear our voices, do they see someone who is appealing and authentic, in whose life God is working? Or are we a turn off? Or we just don’t feel our faith is important to pass on to someone else?

I’d suggest that if we feel we are a turn off or we feel unable or unwilling to pass the message of Jesus on, then there are three things we need to attend to in our Christian lives:

God’s word – John knew God’s word – he knew and understood the ways of God and they are all here in God’s word. The bottom line is that everything we need for life and holiness is here.

God’s voice – John was a man who had no problem knowing God’s voice. He had spent time with God. When the Messiah was revealed to him, he knew what he was looking for because God had revealed it to him. Jesus could have been any other baptismal candidate, but John knew the mind of God well enough to be able to see what was going on.

God’s ways – finally, John experienced the Holy Spirit descending and resting on Jesus. It was a spiritual experience. When you have a real experience of Jesus – at any point in your life and to many it happens many times – you just want to tell others about it because it is amazing.

◆ Andrew & Simon’s Story

So here we have Andrew and friend coming to meet Jesus. They’ve just got John’s word for it so they want to find out what Jesus is about. When they ask Jesus where He’s staying Jesus utters these words: “come and see”. It’s interesting to find out the meaning of the Greek here. Jesus isn’t saying come and have a look around my house, see my new double glazing, look at my 3 piece suite, come and sit in the garden and have a cuppa. The word for “see” usually has something to do with understanding things spiritually. “Come and see what you’re *really* looking for” And they do and Andrew finds the experience life transforming. And he tells his brother Simon.

He goes to Simon and says ***"We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.")*** It’s interesting that the word for found here is the same that Archimedes used when he sat in his bath one day and found that he could work out the volume of things by measuring the displacement of water. He ran through the streets of Alexandria naked (or so the story goes) shouting “Eureka!” I have found it. He hadn’t done any real science. He just had a moment of sudden realisation that in just getting in the bath was a key to some profound science. Andrew’s meeting Jesus had a profound effect on him. He saw spiritually and it was a eureka moment for him. The penny dropped – Jesus is the Messiah – God’s Spirit had revealed something to Him.

And the first thing he did was pass it on to his brother. Andrew was the quiet one – Simon had the big mouth – yet it was Andrew’s simple testimony that brought his brother to Jesus. How are members of your family going to know about Jesus? Are you praying that they will come and hear a preacher? Or that you can engineer a visit from someone who will come and witness? Don’t waste your prayer time on that. You are that witness. Pray that God will let Him speak through you and lead them to that eureka moment when they understand that they need a Saviour.

◆ Philip & Nathaniel’s Story

The third story is interesting because Jesus seeks out Philip in this case. We don’t know how Philip came to know Jesus. We’re just told that Jesus sought him out. As we come to consider our own

witness to our family like Andrew to his brother Simon or Philip to his friend Nathaniel, we need to understand that Jesus is also seeking to bring them to Himself.. Jesus said

This is not a process that Jesus has cut us loose to do. It's His desire that people know about Him and respond to Good News. So when we seek to pass on the Good News, we do it with His Holy Spirit present. And when we do it like that, then it will make the difference as it did with Philip.

So Philip has his encounter with Jesus and guess what – he immediately goes to his friend Nathaniel to pass it on. And what response does he get. Pretty negative actually. *45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth."* Nazareth. Phah! You must be joking! It's the reason why many Christians can't or won't pass their faith on. It's those words of rejection – the way people just cast off what they say about Jesus.

This morning is practical. How do we deal with that. Like Philip did. *46 "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," answered Philip.* How do we do that when Jesus is not physically present. Well, His Spirit is and He's in you. What often makes an impact in the mind of the sceptic is when Christians pray and things happen. It may be something big – a miracle – a healing – but often it is just an answer to a simple prayer. Nathaniel wasn't impressed by something great Jesus did, but by the fact that Jesus knew what Nathaniel was up to underneath the fig tree when Jesus saw him. *47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, "Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 "Teacher," answered Nathanael, "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus said, "Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!" 51 And he said to them, "I am telling you the truth: you will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man."* We don't know what Nathaniel was doing but clearly he was thinking something that was relevant and private - just between him and God – and Jesus knew all about it. Nathaniel saw who Jesus was straight away because of that.

Be prepared to be surprised by Jesus! Come and see. Prayer works. Invoke it. Pray for people. Tell then you are doing it – it is very rare for anyone to refuse or object. Better still, pray that God will give you Holy Spirit boldness to pray for them on the spot.

How do I get to do that – look back at this. That's how John the Baptist got to do it. Why not me? Why not you?

So where has our brief journey through John 1 taken us this morning.

1. **"Pass it on"** The Good News about Jesus came about because people received it, they understood it and they passed it on. That's how the Good News spreads. We've got the strange idea that people become Christians through good advertising, or people coming to Church for special services or the rest of it. They all help, but it only works when Good News is passed on from one person to another. People come to Christ because of word of mouth. Let me give you a quote made over a decade ago now but the same applies for almost every study since of how people become Christians: *The Christian community continues to expand by word-of-mouth. We can do all the advertising in the world, but research shows that two-thirds to three-quarters of all new church members in this country responded because a friend or family member invited them. In fast growing churches, the range is two-thirds to seven-eighths, and in very rapidly growing churches invitations from friends or family members account for more than 90 percent of new members.* Why? Because people find that Jesus is fantastic and seek to tell anyone and everyone about it! And it starts with family and friends.
2. **"Come and See"** God gives people those Eureka moments like Andrew and Nathaniel had. For most people their first Eureka moment is when they realise who Jesus is and desire to follow Him. Knowing that at the core of growing churches are people that find Jesus so amazing that they can't wait to share Him, then where Christians or churches for that matter find it difficult to share their faith, churches usually don't grow. I know by virtue of my age, that it is easy to become cold in my faith, demotivated, distracted by other things, depressed and all the rest of it. Yet in this passage we have the challenge "Come and see". If that's us this morning then Jesus is saying "Come and see". Read My Word, listen to My voice, look

out for My mighty deeds in answer to your prayers and in the prayers of others!”

3. **“The Eureka Moment”** Finally, remember that the process of conviction and conversion is the work of the Spirit of God but our responsibility is to just speak the message. God has already given us the recipients – they are our family, friends, neighbours, workmates. We are His witnesses. As I’ve said before. We are already His witnesses. What is our message? As we look at a world disinterested in Christ, Christians and Church, then we understand what that message is by and large. They’re not interested in Christ because we’re not either. You might not like that statement but the matter is self-evident. But it needn’t be like that. We have a wonderful Holy Spirit who specialises in re-igniting Christians and churches!

God wants us to be different and Scripture more than gives us the key to how we will be witnesses that can’t wait to tell others. How will they know about Jesus? They will when they see Him in our lives, our actions and our words. Let’s be challenged this morning to repent of the times when we have allowed ourselves to grow cold, to forget how great our faith is and not tell others. Let’s use this opportunity to ask God for another eureka moment – to realise who He is and fill us again with that yearning and enthusiasm to see others come to Christ;

Let’s pray and pass it on.

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