

Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 15th January 2023

(The readings in bold are the ones to be used for Morning Prayer)

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-14

1Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Last year I was invited to join the board of an organisation called Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA). We explored this further through a series of online interviews and, quite wonderfully, I was appointed. It's always interesting to join a team that has been working effectively together for a while. Where will I fit in? What is the value I bring to the organisation? And, at a very human level will we get along – particularly when we disagree about some things? In November last year we hosted the CRSA AGM in Toowoomba with staff and board members coming from most States in Australia.

Meeting for the first time face to face rather than online gave great opportunity to get to know each other better and to develop mutual respect and friendship. I am looking forward to the work before us this year.

Of course, you don't have to join a board to experience the feeling of being far from the inner circle that runs the show. To a greater or lesser extent there appear to be pecking orders in most organisations and groups. So, when we start a new job – where do we fit in? When our kids start at a new school how welcome will they be in their class, and how welcome will we be at the P & F?

If we have migrated to Australia from another country, or have come to Australia as a refugee or asylum seeker there can be additional challenges because the dominant language and culture is very different to our own. When this has been our experience how long has it taken for us to feel part of things, and for Australia to feel like home?

Even in our church communities and organisations there are formal and informal hierarchies and I'd like us to bear this in mind as we reflect on today's Gospel reading.

In this, we are told that John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples when Jesus walked by. At this stage we don't know their names but we are told they were disciples of John. They were his close followers, if you like, part of his inner circle. John the Baptist was a popular preacher and large numbers of people from all walks of life came to listen to his teaching and be baptised by him. So, I think being one of his disciples would have been a significant thing.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus he affirmed, *“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”* In other words, he was saying: This is the person I’ve been telling you about! This is the one I’ve been preparing you for!

In response those two disciples left John and followed Jesus. It would be easy to miss the significance of this and go on to what happened next but I think it’s important to note that they left where they were comfortable, to learn more about Jesus. We can only imagine what their hopes would have been. They may have thought well we’ll listen and learn, and perhaps over time be known and accepted into this new community of disciples.

This is where Jesus did something surprising. Instead of waiting for these two new people to gradually transition in, before he even knew their names, he asked them this significant question, *“What are you looking for?”* Their response is almost comical and seems to indicate that they were unprepared for Jesus, the leader of this new group to speak directly to them. They didn’t respond with a deep theological question like, *“Are you the Messiah?”* or, *“Are you the one promised by the prophets all these years?”* Instead, they said, *“Rabbi, where are you staying?”*

The Gospel tells us that Jesus didn’t mock them or turn them away, he simply said, *“Come and see!”* How surprising for those two followers of John the Baptist. Jesus, the popular teacher, was giving them priority and was saying *come and see where I live and spend the rest of the day with me.*

Clearly this experience of spending time with Jesus was transformative, because the first thing Andrew did in response was to go and find his brother Simon to tell him about Jesus and introduce him.

In our congregational worship we might recognise people like those two disciples of John the Baptist because they haven’t come before and are new. They might be visiting for some reason so they’re not sure where to sit; they wonder what page we’re on in the Prayer Book; or, which book we’re singing from. They could be people who are just visiting; people from our community who dropped out of church years ago; or people who’ve never been to church... but, are searching for something.

When we recognise them as new people, I wonder how we respond? Are we up for engaging with a new person to find out who they are, and how they’re going? Are we open to the possibility of spending time with them over a cup of tea, and if it seems right... inviting them back for lunch?

Remember Jesus did not say ‘You’ll find out what I’m about if you just keep listening from a distance!’ he said, *“Come and see!”* Come and spend a day with me and when you’re

ready, move from being on the outside to being on the inside. Move from being an observer, to being a participant.

In some ways Andrew's response to this time with Jesus is confronting. He was so moved by that time, and by the potential for deep friendship that had begun, he wanted his brother Simon to be part of it. In some ways Andrew's invitation to Simon echoed the invitation from Jesus he had received, "Come and see!"

When was the last time you or I invited someone to "Come and see?" When was the last time you or I invited someone to come to church with us for worship, or join us in a church activity? Come and see! There are some wonderful people I'd love for you to meet and spend time with; and there is a great opportunity to learn more about God's love and purpose for our lives.

The catalyst for Andrew was clearly the time he'd spent with Jesus. So, do you and I have that same sense of spending time with Christ each day – through prayer, Bible reading and reflection? Do you and I have a sense of Christ's grace and peace, in the midst of ordinary life: like cooking, cleaning and sharing a meal; in the midst of walking, driving, or resting?

Prayer, Bible reading, and reflection are things we could each do more of trusting that in these Christ meets with us through his Spirit – empowering us to make a difference for good no matter where we are; and no matter who we are.

Would you please join me in prayer:

"Loving God, we give thanks for the warm invitation of Christ to the disciples of long ago, and for that same invitation today. Through your Spirit we ask for the desire to grow more deeply in relationship with you, and the desire to make a difference for good wherever we are, and whomever we are with. We ask in the name of the one who said, 'Come and see!' Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."