Jesus invites us into a relationship where he becomes known

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1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-5, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

So this is now the second Sunday after Epiphany and we are about half way through the season. As you know the Sundays after Epiphany are about the revelation of who and what Jesus is. In today's gospel we have a feast of ideas about Jesus. He is a rabbi—a teacher, the Son of God and the Son of Man. John's gospel is like that, full of rich language about Jesus; but even he admits that his words about Jesus are not the only ones that could be written. He ends his gospel with an interesting verse. He writes, *"There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."*

There must be more things written about Jesus than any other person on the planet yet there is still seems more and more being written. All those sermons, all those books, all those Radio National programs and interviews, all those essays and words by philosophers, atheists, anarchists, Marxists, theologians, scientists, politicians and nameless university students. Here are just some a couple of things that have been said about Jesus.

From Napoleon Bonaparte: "I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him."

Mahatma Ghandi: "A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act."

Florence Nightingale: "People talk about imitating Christ, and imitate Him in the little trifling formal things, such as washing the feet, saying His prayer, and so on; but if anyone attempts the real imitation of Him, there are no bounds to the outcry with which the presumption of that person is condemned."

Douglas Adams: "2,000 years ago one man got nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be if everyone was nice to each other for a change."

I could of course go on and on, but you get the picture. Every one it seems has something to say about Jesus. We are practically drowning in a sea of ideas and concepts about him: Lamb of God, the Messiah, Son of God, the Christ and all the rest that the world cannot contain. The words are important, but there is something else in our Gospel passage that puts all of these words in their place and points us to the one and only necessary thing.

Our Gospel passage sits in a section where Jesus is getting introduced to a range of people. Previously we had John the Baptist talking about Jesus and how he is the Lamb of God, how the Holy Spirit descended upon him and stayed with him. Two disciples hear John say, "Look, here is the Lamb of God" and they start to follow him. Jesus notices, turns around and

says his first words in the gospel, “What are you looking for?” When they ask a question in return, “Where are you going?” he says, “Come and see”. In the passage we heard Jesus finds Philip, our St Philip, and says follow me. Philip finds Nathaniel and wants to introduce him to Jesus. When Nathaniel says, yes, but can anything good come out of Nazareth, Philip says, “Come and see”.

They don’t say, “Go and ask John, he can tell you all you need to know”. They don’t say, “Read this book, do this course, go and talk to that priest, teacher or guru”. They say, “Come and see”. Jesus says, “Come and see for yourselves where I am going”, “come and see who I am”. And these people do. They spend the day with him. They walk beside him. They spend time with him. After that they are excited and convinced.

We can hear and read a lot of words about Jesus. We can even say a lot of words about him but that does not compare to answering his invitation to “come and see” and spend time with him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that the fundamental question was not, was Jesus the Son of God or any other lofty title we can think of but who was Jesus for each and every one of us. It is the question we ask about a real person and a real relationship. The only way we can ever know the answer to that question is by taking the risk of getting close enough to find out.

We have to put our books aside, turn off the Radio National religion program, switch off Compass, take any thing a preacher says with a grain of salt and get close to Christ Jesus. When he says, “Come” that is exactly what we must do. It is only when we come to Jesus that all our questions about him can truly begin to be answered. I find it intriguing and revealing that the first words of Jesus in this gospel, the gospel with the most theological language, the most abstract ideas about Jesus, are about invitation into a relationship. So I ask, have you ever come to Jesus?

I probably sound like an evangelical preacher when I ask that question but it is a question worth asking. How often do we open our heart and hear the call of Jesus to “come” and then actually do it? How often do we simple spend a day with Jesus? Half a day? What about an hour? Twenty minutes any one?

There are many ways that we can find that place of connection and time with the Christ. For some it comes from reading scripture. The Word of God, the word made flesh, meets us somehow in the stories, poetry and paradoxes of the bible. For some it comes from connecting with the Spirit of Christ in nature for all things live and move and have their being through and for him. When we touch base with the living world we are close to the wonder of Christ Jesus and his life-giving power. For some it happens through the process of creativity, in the making of something true and good. For some it comes through prayer, that is communion with God or when we come and kneel at the sanctuary and receive the bread and the wine. Mother Theresa met Christ in the poor and outcast of Calcutta. For most of us it is mixture of all those things and it is a heart business, not a thing of the intellect.

In all of this we need to remember that the ground God is much bigger than any idea, picture or experience we have of God. Our psalm points us to that: “How deep are your thoughts to me, O God: and how great is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they are more in number than the sand: were I to come to the end, I would still be with you.” (Ps. 139.17-18).

A student once said to his guru: “Master, master, while I was mediating the Buddha appeared to me.” The teacher replied, “don’t worry, just ignore him and he will go away”.

My own practice is to recite the Orthodox prayer, the Jesus prayer. The staretz, the Russian monks, say to ignore any visions that might come to you and to just keep praying the prayer, coming to Christ over and over again. The Buddhist monks and orthodox religious know that the divine should never be contained or bound to our limited experience and capabilities.

Yet despite the greatness of God and the smallness of us, we can discern the whisper of Jesus who comes at the most unexpected times. We hear the word "come" and we are drawn immediately. In the word "come" is promise and hope and we know they are true. Oswald Chambers writes, "Personal contact with Jesus alters everything. Be stupid enough to come and commit yourself to what he says". That is of course what Andrew did and then Simon and Philip and Nathanial and Mary and Martha and all the rest. They came and found in being with him, being close to him, something intriguing, fascinating and wondrous. They answered the invitation to come and see and their lives were irrevocably changed. That's the rub isn't it?

It is a whole lot safer to stay with what other people write and say about Jesus rather than finding out for ourselves. It is very easy to refute what other people say about our Lord. In fact it is fun. But getting close to him might actually mean we have to change, or do something different, or let go of some ideas or habits. It might mean we have to live in a radically different way. And for some of us any change is too much change.

Dear friends, we can safely read the books, do the degrees, listen to the radio. We can see Jesus walking by and simply admire the fact that he does. We can discuss why he does and hear other people say, "There goes Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, the Lamb of God, the Rabbi, the Son of God". We can observe and talk and chatter. We can even take on some of these ideas we hear and try and be better people, more loving and neighborly and we will probably enjoy ourselves in the process and perhaps even do some good. Or we can get close to Jesus. Now that's a journey that will take us to a whole other place.