

JANUARY 20 ~ SECOND SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

READINGS: John 1:29 – 42; 1 Corinthians 1:1 – 9; Isaiah 49:1 – 7; Psalm 40:1 – 11

Sermon A

The church at Corinth was the local expression of a universal society. In Paul's letter to this community there are some strong warnings and criticisms, but all this is preceded by joy. This joy comes from God's grace at work in the lives of these 'saints'. Despite what is to come in the letter, Paul is sharing the overwhelming joy that finding salvation brings.

John the Baptist is almost certain that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the one who can turn true repentance into the forgiveness of sin. This is a pretty good endorsement from the guy who was known for calling others to repent and symbolically washing them clean in the Jordan.

I have seen people enter the kingdom of God through evangelistic events, missions and courses, such as Alpha. What has always been at the heart, though, is the invitation from someone. The growth in some youth groups is not down to a prayerful leader, or a fantastic programme, although both are vital. The growth is down to the young people themselves inviting their friends along. Invites flow more freely with the excitement of new faith.

SERMON B

Isaiah's account of Israel's calling can be coupled with the disciples' calling in John chapter 1 and our calling today.

The calling of the servant-church:

Israel's calling had come from God and from the outset the nation had been set-aside for a special purpose. The Church's calling has also come from God; and as God's people of today, the Church needs to be conscious of God's intentions for us. We too have been set aside for a special purpose – to reach out to the wider world and to call others to discipleship.

The despondency of the servant-church:

Isaiah wrote of Israel's sense of failure, when it seemed that the nation's purpose was unfulfilled. Far from being successful, the people endured exile in Babylon. Sometimes we feel despondent today, when the Church seems to be failing to fulfil God's plans. The inability of Christians to find unity can be one factor, which compounds our sense of weakness and failure. If the Church becomes consumed by internal competition, then its energy cannot be directed outwards.

A new and greater task for the servant-church:

Rather than succumbing to a sense of hopelessness, the servant nation was reminded that it had a greater purpose. Israel was to be a light to other nations, so that the entire world could be saved. Like Israel, the Church should not be limited by boundaries. God calls us to overcome the restrictions, which limit our work and our vision. We need to have confidence in addressing the greater task, of calling others to discipleship.

SERMON C

When I first decided to align myself with Jesus and to follow him, I made some amazing discoveries about him, the same discoveries John the Baptist and two of his disciples had made – he is the Son of God who identifies with us; he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; he is the Messiah, God’s chosen and anointed King – nothing and no one comes close to him!

I also began to make the same discoveries the Christians in Corinth had made – Jesus has given me a life of free and open access to God, any time and any place; God’s grace is at work in my life, changing me; God’s gifts are available to me; God himself is right alongside to keep me steady and on track; God will never give up on me; God has called me to have fellowship with his Son.

No wonder I was full of an overwhelming joy and excitement, the overwhelming joy and excitement that being found by Jesus brings, the kind of joy and excitement the writer of today’s Psalm must have experienced, for he too had been found – God had lifted him out of the ditch, God had pulled him from deep mud, God had stood him up on a solid rock, God had taught him the latest worship song. And like the psalmist, I was so full of joy and excitement that I told everybody about the One who had found me, keeping nothing back, not keeping him to myself, not keeping him a secret – I told it all the way it is and let everyone know the whole story. Like Andrew, I just had to go and tell someone in the family – in the end, I told the whole family about Jesus.

Another discovery I made – and it was another exciting one – was that God hadn’t just called me to have fellowship with his Son, he had called me in to fellowship of his Son, that world-wide circle of Jesus’ friends and followers, the holy Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. Here is a reminder that the Church was brought into being by Jesus, here is reminder that the Church is kept going by Jesus and here is reminder that the Church belongs to Jesus, not the members. When will we stop treating it as though it belongs to us?

As a young Christian, I often used to wonder what the Church is for, what the Church's special purpose is. Today's passage from Isaiah provides the answer. The special purpose for which God set up the Church was as a light for the nations so that his salvation becomes global, his saving power reaching to the ends of the earth, no one excluded! So it's not a question of keeping the show on the road or shining so that people will give us a round of applause. No, we are to shine in such a way that people will see Jesus, the Light of the world, and come to him, the real light that comes into the world and shines on everyone.

In today's passage from the Good News about Jesus as written by John, we find an invitation from Jesus himself: "Come and see for yourself." It's an invitation to a spiritual adventure where you will make the same amazing discoveries about Jesus – who he is and what he does; it's an invitation to a spiritual adventure where you won't be able to keep quiet about Jesus and what he's done for you; it's an invitation to a spiritual adventure where you will join that world-wide circle of Jesus' friends and followers and together with them be a light for the world, including Penicuik; it's an invitation to a spiritual adventure where you will point people to Jesus so that they too will come and see for themselves. Do you hear him today? "Come and see for yourself." What's keeping you?