

John's Gospel is not like the other three gospels we have in our Bible. It tells many of the same stories, recounts the same events, but not always in the same order, and the writer often tells us not only what Jesus did or taught but why he did such things.

This writer also paints a more divine picture of Jesus, as if he doesn't want us to miss the point that this earthly Jesus is God's Son, who existed before all time.

We only need to read and compare small portions of John's Gospel with similar stories in Matthew, Mark or Luke to see the differences. John presents a richer tapestry, and tells us his purpose for writing in chapter 20, verse 31:

*...these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

One commentator has this to say about the differences between the accounts in the gospels of Jesus calling his disciples:

'There are those who try to harmonise the conflicting records. But if the Gospels are more hymn-sheets than history books then we should not be looking for the harmony we insist on in, say, the testimony of witnesses to a road accident.

All four gospels agree that to encounter Jesus is to be drawn to him..... there is nothing discordant in their understanding of what it means to meet Jesus for the first time.' (*John Pridmore, 'The Word is very near you', 2009*)

In today's Gospel we hear John the Baptist speaking about Jesus, who he'd baptised the day before. John declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and that he saw the Spirit descend upon him.

What is the significance of calling Jesus a 'lamb'? Why would John the Baptist call Jesus the Lamb of God? What happens to lambs at the Passover? They are sacrificed. Is John the Baptist predicting or prophesying about how Jesus will end his life?

Right at the beginning of his ministry, the shadow of the cross is already present.

The following day, John the Baptist again called Jesus the Lamb of God, and two of his followers left and went after Jesus. He asked them, "What are you looking for?" but instead of answering they asked where he was staying. I imagine they wanted to sit down for a good long conversation.

In a way, their question "where are you staying?" was an answer- they were looking for Jesus. His reply: "Come and see". In this Fourth Gospel, 'to see' is to know who Jesus is; and to know him is to love him, to love him is to serve him, to serve him is to be free.

Andrew went to find his brother Simon and told him that they had found the Messiah, the one all Israel was waiting and yearning for. When Andrew introduced Simon to Jesus, we read that Jesus 'looked at him'. Near the end of his life Jesus will look at him again; and Peter will break down in tears.

Simon gets a new name, and gradually grows into his new identity as Peter, the rock, the one on whom Jesus said he would build his church, the one who was given the keys of the kingdom.

Just imagine if Andrew had not gone to tell his brother, and hadn't brought him to see Jesus. Imagine if Andrew had said to himself, "I wonder if our Simon would like this fella; what will he say if I ask him to come with me tomorrow? Perhaps I'd better not, he can be a bit hot-tempered and he's always busy, what with the fishing business and all..."

Thanks be to God, Andrew DID tell Simon Peter, he took the trouble to find him, persuaded him to go with him and introduced him to Jesus.

The importance of such introductions and invitations is impossible to overstate. Every single one of us is here today, in God's church, because somebody invited us or took us or sowed a seed that encouraged us to give it a try.

Who first brought you to church? Was it your parents, grandparents, friends? Who encouraged you, made you welcome, made friends and invited you to stay for a cuppa? Thank God for the saints who introduced us to Jesus!

My parents didn't go to church, although I was baptised as a baby. I went to a Church of England primary school, like just about everybody else at that time, and so I learnt to sing hymns and to pray, and was taught the Bible stories. Seeds were sown, and although I didn't darken a church door for many years there was something there.

When our first child was born I realised I wanted more for her, so Allan and I started going to the Anglican church up the road to see about getting her christened.

What we found were friendly, welcoming people and a community we soon grew to love. Sarah was baptised, and later I was confirmed- then we came to Australia.

We joined the Anglican church in Kelmscott and Allan was confirmed, and the rest is history!

I am convinced that no amount of advertising, publicity or social media promotion- helpful as they can all be- will ever be as effective as a personal conversation. Inviting someone to 'come and see', offering to accompany them, sitting beside them, talking to them afterwards about what they thought, answering their questions as best we can- this is how the early church grew and how the church will continue to grow.....or not.

We need to overcome our reticence, our shyness in talking about our faith and our lives as followers of Jesus, and tell people- they deserve to know! What we have must not be a secret, because there is a sense in which faith is not really faith unless it is shared.

We demonstrate our faith in our lives by our actions and attitudes, which speak volumes; but sometimes we need words as well. Maybe all the words we need are: Come and see.