

HOMILY SUNDAY 02 - B

“Encountering Jesus”

(1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19; Psalm 40; 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20; John 1:35-42)

A pastor was getting ready to go on vacation. He had a few parting words for the congregation: “Every pastor should take a month of vacation every year. If the pastor is really good at his work, then that pastor needs a vacation. If the pastor is not really good at it, then the congregation needs a break!”

Can you recall meeting a friend who changed your life?

Encountering Jesus as Friend is a life-changing experience.

When I was a university student I became good friends with Peter Chu, a Chinese student from Hong Kong. From the beginning I was struck by his many qualities. He was organizing student activities in such a humble way that many did not even know it was him. He taught me the importance of having a philosophy of life, and being loyal and true to an agreement. We eventually went into a Home Portraiture business together and again his humility came to the fore as most employees did not even know that he was the owner of the business. Years after we met, he asked me if I remembered how our friendship began. He went on to tell me that he had observed me around campus for a while and decided that he would become friends with me. Though I have since lost touch with him, he remains an important influence in my life.

The focus of this section of the gospel is two-fold: the identity of Jesus and the meaning of discipleship which culminates in friendship.

First, the purpose of John the Baptist’s witness is to reveal Jesus as the source of redemption for the world. John uses two titles: Lamb of God and Son of God. The hope of redemption lies in recognizing Jesus as the Son of God. John does the same as the prologue, claiming Jesus’ relationship with God as the decisive category for understanding who Jesus is. The disciples themselves add two more titles, rabbi or teacher, and especially Messiah, the long awaited one.

The reason there are so many titles given for Jesus is that each disciple comes to Jesus with differing expectations and needs, and those needs are met. Yet none of these titles ultimately answers the question “Who is Jesus?” because the reality of Jesus transcends all titles. In fact, as the gospel progresses, the titles of Chapter 1 will be replaced, expanded, transformed or redefined by Jesus’ words and works and ultimately by his death and resurrection. We are cautioned not to limit Jesus to pre-conceived categories and expectations but to remain open for surprising revelations of God. Settling for one title too absolutely precludes fresh and vital calls for discipleship. To insist on one name only for Jesus is to miss the fullness of his identity that points to the boundless grace of God in Jesus that is given to the disciple who is open and believes.

Out of all these titles, I am convinced Jesus would and does prefer that of *friend*. That is why his answer to the question “Where do you stay?” is “Come and see.” He desires relationship,

friendship, with his disciples. Later in the gospel he would call his disciples not servants but friends. And at the end of the gospel he bases the call to Peter to shepherd the church on love as forgiveness. "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus asks him three times, reminding him of his three betrayals but most of all of how much he has been forgiven, and thus how much he can now love with gratitude.

Corbin Eddy, in his commentary on this gospel, points out that there is a huge difference between power and influence. Those who wield power over us oppress us, trying to turn us into slaves or copies of themselves. Those who exercise influence on us do not try to convert us or change us or mould us. They offer us the space in which we can find ourselves and our own way. Jesus didn't exercise power over his disciples. But he had a profound influence on them. That encounter changed the lives of Peter, Andrew and John. We can't encounter Jesus in the flesh. But we can encounter him spiritually in faith as a Friend, a Brother and a Saviour.

Not to know Jesus is not to have discovered what Christianity is about. Christianity involves a warm, close relationship with Jesus. Jesus is forever passing by. He is always available to those who are sincerely looking for him, but he never forces himself on anyone. To those who are interested in knowing more, he says what he said to John and Andrew; "Come and see." Of course it is not a once-and-for-all encounter, but a growing relationship with him that we are talking about.

Seeking Jesus is a theme of this gospel, from the first disciples seeking him, to Mary Magdalene seeking him in faith at the end. To *seek Jesus* and to *come to him* is an active movement of faith towards the person of Jesus and the understanding in faith of who he is. This is so memorable a happening for the disciples that John even marks the *hour* that their lives changed and the community began with Jesus.

John's first disciples are anonymous, as his notion of discipleship is much broader and open ended than the Synoptics. John has no list of disciples. The story of the two new disciples is incomplete until their witness brings others to Jesus. What is clear is that the glory of God has achieved its perfection as something revealing itself to men in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is an intimate meal with Jesus. We hear his word and share in his Body and Blood. In turn, like Andrew, we are empowered and commissioned to go out, to do his will and tell the world about him.

So remember, encountering Jesus is a life-changing experience. Like the first disciples, let us seek him, stay with him and share him with others.