

# ***Finding others***

*Second Sunday after the Epiphany*

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## **Sunday, January 15, 2023**

As we get into the reading of Scripture, we will go through a number of phases. We begin with the exploration or discovery phase, by that I mean each time we read from God's word, we are discovering something new, a bit like the first time we drive down a road. We tend to see the bigger items, and remember the key events, but the detail is overwhelmed

After a while, we enter the second phase, when we know what is coming up, and like on that road, we can anticipate the story. Sure this is familiar ground, but there is always something new in the detail. We perhaps lose the bigger picture and become familiar with the detail. And in the detail here is always something new. Not that is hidden, but we have not seen it up until now. We saw a house near Kkempton last monsay, that we had not noticed before. We no longer read for the bigger picture, but for the detail.

These two ways of reading tend to be linear. Start at the beginning, and work our way to the end. The next phase tends to bring our reading into three dimensions or in to a network. In this phase, we discover a whole new way of taken in Scripture. It essentially comes when we start to find interconnections. Like take the tree of life. It is found at the beginning and the end of Scripture (that is Genesis and Revelation) and the river of life (flowing out from the temple) is found in the vision of Ezekiel and in Revelation. It is when we understand the meaning of the communion expressed in terms of the Passover stories of Exodus

For many this is a slow process, but there is the sudden aha moment when we realise we are doing it. Now at this point in our reading of Scripture, we become able to not only glean what is there, but somehow put it together into a large picture.

Let me just say, that I encourage you in your reading of Scripture that you might reach this point.

Perhaps this is a little bit of a preamble, but what I want to do is a little bit of looking across scripture at the bigger picture. Last week, we focussed on the Baptism of Jesus as it was recorded in Matthew's Gospel. This week, our Gospel turns to John. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) there next follows the story of Jesus taken out to the wilderness, and being tempted. (We will visit these when we get to the first Sunday of Lent. Our Gospel this morning describes what happens as Jesus returns from the wilderness.

Now it is important to understand the timing that we speak of – John is free, and Jesus has just been baptised. Jesus is not in ministry yet. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, he begins as an itinerant preacher after John had been put in prison. After that, Jesus goes to the shores of Galilee and calls Peter and Andrew, James and John. These events occurred before that. And our characters are Peter, Andrew and John.

Now why is this important.

I think that in Sunday School, we concentrate on phase one, and a little bit on phase two of our understanding of Scripture. When we read the Gospel accounts, we read how Jesus walked along the shore and called Peter and Andrew, then James and John...

**AND THEY RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY.....**

And we base our ideas about evangelism in these terms. We have the sense, that we just need to walk up to total strangers and ask them to follow Jesus and they will. And more to the point, that if we do not see this response, then we are not doing it right.

Reading John's Gospel shows us that Jesus had a pre-established relationship with these fishermen. They had sat with him, talked with him and shared with him and from this, they could make an informed decision when Jesus asked them.

This might seem insignificant, but it changes our whole understanding about evangelism, about call and response. It means, that the idea of the big evangelism rally, the mission, is only going to work, when time has been taken to establish the relationships in our community.

As a country church, we have a wonderful advantage. For better or worse, we are a church of a community. In the cities, churches are more likely gatherings of like minded people, but we are the community gathered together. If the church was not here, our people would know each other through the school or the market or the Fire Brigade or at Golf; In the cricket club or in the football clubs. Our community is not defined by the church, but rather the church is defined by the community.

That is rather an important idea, so I will repeat it - Our community is not defined by the church, but rather our church is defined by the community.

Evangelism for us, is not about talking to strangers, but to those we know and love. Our framework for evangelism is in terms of the community, the family....

But this is always the case.

Andrew first found his brother Simon.... He brought Simon to Jesus. Our challenge as God's people is not to worry about the strangers, but to seek inside our community for those whose hearts are seeking the Messiah and to introduce them to the Lamb of God.

May God, give you and me insight to see those whose hearts hunger after him, and courage to lead them to Jesus.

**AMEN**