Reflection for 18th January (Epiphany 2)

Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. He had already left his home in Galilee to follow John, but, as we read in today's Gospel, when his teacher called out "Look, here is the Lamb of God", he instinctively followed Jesus. And having followed him, he stayed with him for the rest of the day, and the rest of the day became the rest of his life. Not content with that, he went and got his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus: he, too, was never the same again – not even his name remained the same, as he became Peter.

That day at Bethany was the defining moment in the life of Andrew and Simon Peter. But what was it that Jesus said which made them follow? All Jesus said was "Come and see" – the classic call of the gospel, because Jesus knows that if you do, if you see and hear and understand, you will be convinced as you have never been convinced before, and it will change you for ever.

Andrew heard and saw and followed and stayed, and as a consequence the great work of the gospel began, and has continued ever since. We, too, have to be prepared for the unexpected, because if we are not, we are unlikely to be able to hear God's call. If we cannot see Christ in the needs of our neighbour, then we have made ourselves deaf to the word of God. If we are not willing to be surprised by the kingdom on a daily basis, then we will be unable to recognise that it is already here amongst us, as Jesus told us.

The vital element is to be able to recognise those signs of the kingdom which we see in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: hope and light for a world where people still suffer needlessly, and where others need help to make sense of the things that happen to them. We need to recover that sense of expectation, that faith that the kingdom has come, that the Word has been made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Andrew wasn't the only one who had a surprise that day by the river Jordan: there was a surprise for John the Baptist, too. Day by day, he had been baptising new disciples and spreading the word. But on that particular day, someone appeared who changed everything. God burst in with a message which no-one expected: the message that out of sacrifice comes power, out of obedience comes freedom, out of forgiveness comes peace, and out of death comes resurrection. That message is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and it has changed our lives, and the life of the world, forever.

Bob Whittle