



Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton



Letter for the Fifth Sunday of Lent 2024

17th March 2024

To my dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

This is one of my favourite moments in the fourth Gospel. Some Greek-speaking Jews want to meet with Jesus. They need an introduction and approach the apostle Philip who came from Bethsaida, a busy commercial place where Greek was spoken freely. Philip recruits Andrew to the task and the two disciples go to Jesus with the request.

Mention of Andrew reminds me of an earlier Gospel moment when this apostle first met Jesus. At the time, he was a disciple of the Baptist. John had just pointed to Jesus and declared, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God'. Now Andrew and a companion decided to follow Jesus along the road. He turns and asks them, 'What are you looking for?' Some translations say, 'What are you seeking?' As the Passion unfolds, Jesus will ask the same question of those who come to arrest him. But at the beginning of the Gospel, there is a different response. Andrew and his friend want to know where Jesus is staying. What Jesus is really asking them is this, what do you desire? As the Gospel unfolds, the disciples come to see who Jesus is. They learn how to desire life in communion with him. They are living in the school of apostolic mission.

Today Jesus teaches Andrew and Philip a master-class. If these Greek-speaking Jews want to meet with Jesus, they must discover who he really is. He is the grain of wheat that must fall on the ground and die in order to yield a rich harvest. And the only way to learn this, is to enter into the same journey of dying and rising ourselves. If fascination attracts us to our Lord, it will not be enough to keep us within a deepening relationship with him. The master-class continues. 'Wherever I am, my servant will be there too.' Later in chapter 17 of John's Gospel, we are privileged to hear the high-priestly prayer of Jesus to his Father. Jesus prays, 'Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me'.

Do we desire that this prayer of Jesus is fulfilled for us during these days of Lent? Within Christian discipleship, wisdom is gained through the suffering of the crosses in our lives. We understandably shy away from the Cross. We are inclined to seek an easier form of discipleship. We join our Lord in our souls being troubled by the thought of such an hour in our lives. But we may also find encouragement that this is the path to our witnessing Jesus' glory. Today we enter into Passiontide. Our focus is on Jesus. Let us accompany him as he resolutely sets his face towards Jerusalem. And during these days, may we renew our conviction to serve the Lord and give ourselves generously to what has been asked of us.

I wonder whether those Greek-speaking Jews still wanted to meet with Jesus when the apostles returned to tell them what would be involved in this encounter?

Sincerely,

Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton