

A Epiphany 2
Place: St Mary's
1.1-9

15th January 17
Is 99.1-7, 1 Cor

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Theme: How do we recognise God in our lives?
Jn1.29-42

- ◆ Isaiah says 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity'. He has worked long and hard as a prophet, he has been faithfully listening to God and responding to God's call, but he feels that it is futile. Maybe he even wonders if he has been mistaken about God's presence in his prophecy. Yet once he has expressed his frustration he reminds himself of God's care for him and God's faithfulness and continues 'Yet surely my cause is with the Lord, my reward with my God.
- ◆ Isaiah's doubt and frustration are recognisable to us all. As human beings God is hidden from us most of the time. Recognising God, even when God is right in front of us is very hard. We easily mistake other things for God and we live mostly by faith even when we are on the right track. Too easily we human beings make gods out of things that are less than God: Wealth, power, influence, our careers or families, all kinds of things. These are things that in themselves are not bad, but if we give them first place in our lives; if they become our priority rather than God, things go terribly wrong. Even with the best intention it is easy to mistake other things for God and to be

mistaken about God. It is only when things go wrong of we feel frustrated and let down that we realised how deeply mistaken we have been and we discover that we have in fact 'laboured in vain and spent our strength for nothing and vanity.' It is a very painful thing to discover this in our lives, perhaps especially if we had thought we were serving the true God. We may end up in the position TS Elliot describes so eloquently in 'The Wasteland'. 'I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope for hope would be hope for the wrong thing.'

- ◆ John's Gospel has the most detail about John the Baptist in it and he is a very important figure in John's Gospel. He says of Jesus that when he first saw Jesus 'I myself did not know him.' John does not mean that he is not acquainted with Jesus, but rather that he does not know that he is the messiah. Even someone as close to God and obedient to him as John is not able to recognise who Jesus is for himself. He only realises who Jesus is when God reveals it to him, even though he knows to look out for someone to come after him, who he is the forerunner to. God says to him 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' God's word is then confirmed to him, when John baptises Jesus and he sees the Holy Spirit descending on him in the form of a dove.

- ◆ What we learn from this is that even the last great prophet of the Old Testament was not able to recognise who Jesus was on his own. For all his greatness, he has to rely on the Grace of God to reveal who Jesus is to him. He was well practiced in listening to God, so he easily recognised what God was saying to him, but he utterly depended on God's grace to reveal to him who Jesus was, that God's promise had been fulfilled and that his ministry had achieved what God had called him to do.
- ◆ So practicing prayer, reading the Bible, serving God as John did helps us to learn to recognise God's voice when it speaks to us. God's holy spirit comes to lead us into the truth.
- ◆ For most of us however, we discover God and his presence in our lives not through direct revelation, but through other people as the first three disciples to be called in John's Gospel do. Andrew and his friend became disciples of John because they were seeking God and his Messiah. John told them that he was not the one, but the forerunner, so when John tells them that Jesus is the one they have been waiting for they believe him and go to meet Jesus. One of the reasons we belong to the church is that together we help each other learn how to recognise God and get to know him. Learning from other people who are further on in the journey is an important part of this. However, we need to notice what Andrew

and the other disciple do next. They don't just take John's word for it. They go and look for themselves. They want to know that they are on the right track. When they come to Jesus he invites them to come and follow him. In doing this they start to get to know him and to discover for themselves who he is.

- ◆ The other person who is called in this way in today's Gospel is Peter. What is interesting about him is that when Peter comes to see for himself he not only finds the Messiah, but he also discovers who he is. Jesus recognises him and calls him Peter as Peter recognises who Jesus is.
- ◆ As we notice Andrew and the other disciple calling Jesus the Messiah we need to remember that while Jesus knows fully who Peter, Andrew and the Other disciple are they still do not really know who Jesus is.
- ◆ They call him messiah, but in doing so they are not expecting God to come among them to die on the cross; they are expecting him to send them a Messiah who will raise up an army and defeat the Romans. They come to him in the hope of glory and power.
- ◆ When three years later they see Jesus arrested and then crucified they will run away: Peter will deny he even knows Jesus. On Holy Saturday they may well like Isaiah feel that they have 'laboured in vain and spent their strength for

nothing. What they will discover on Easter Day is the full extent of God's love, power and Grace and how little they understand about God and his messiah.