

John 1:35-51

Come and see

Bargains

What do you call someone from Aberdeen? The simple (non jibe) answer is “An Aberdonian.” If you were to answer “Skinflint” I’d take the huff. As you well know the word “Aberdonian” has connotations of thrift, even meanness and those who hail from the Granite City are labelled accordingly. Naturally, I would emphatically deny that such connotations were justified. I know that most people there are generous and open-hearted. Interestingly, over the years I have learned that there are other parts of the country whose residents are also labelled as mean – it all depends where you come from and in many cases the jibes derive from rivalry between neighbouring towns or cities. However, joking apart I have learned that regardless of their place of birth most people are rather good at spotting a bargain. And almost without exception will be rather good at telling their friends and family about it. You don’t need to come from Aberdeen! Or Scotland! Yes, I know it’s not really a bargain if you don’t really need the goods on offer but every now and then you come across an “offer you can’t refuse.” Actually, even coming across such a deal (whether or not you avail yourself of it) makes most people feel good about themselves and perhaps because there isn’t a whole lot of good news about, we are apt to speak to others about our discovery. We tell others about it.

The best bargain ever

I don’t wish to be disrespectful or to lump Jesus in with some little “buy one, get one free” offer in a supermarket but the fact is that the gospel is to my mind undoubtedly the greatest bargain of all time. The free gift of salvation and eternal fellowship with God, offered to us by God in stark contrast to the penalty that our sin deserved. Grace, undeserved, free forgiveness and acceptance – in Christ who died to save us.

John the Baptist had a following. Among those who had taken an interest in his outspoken but profound teaching was a fisherman, Andrew, brother of Simon Peter, destined to be a disciple of Jesus and patron saint of Scotland. He was introduced to Jesus by John who pointed him out as the Christ, the Messiah, the Old Testament prophets had foretold. “Behold the Lamb of God” – these words were a clear signal to Andrew and the others that Jesus was the long-awaited Saviour. It is hardly surprising then that Andrew and his friend took a good deal of interest in Jesus and sought to get to know him and his teaching. When the opportunity arose for them to spend the day with him, they jumped at it. “Come and see” said Jesus and off they went- no doubt thrilled to have the chance of hearing more of his teaching and putting their own questions to him. The gospel tells us virtually nothing about what passed between Jesus and Andrew – it is simply content to record the fact that they spent the day together AND perhaps just as importantly that Andrew returned home to seek out his brother Simon Peter and tell him the wonderful news “We have found the Messiah.” The people of Israel had been waiting expectantly for centuries for God to fulfil his promise of the coming of the Messiah. Deep down in the heart of every faithful Jew

was a hope that they would be around to welcome and worship the Lord's Messiah and share in the kingdom of God that he came to bring. And here was Andrew, fisherman of Galilee, part time follower of John the Baptist meeting and talking with the very man. No wonder he was quick to seek out his brother and share the good news with him. His message wasn't complicated, it didn't require lots of learning or spiritual expertise. It boiled down to this "I've met the Messiah, come and see for yourself!" And as we know, Simon Peter went and saw for himself and later with Andrew and their friends James and John became the first of Jesus followers, and later leaders in the early church. We can be so reticent about sharing even that we believe in Jesus, never mind expressing our beliefs to others. Here is a reminder that it ought to be the most natural thing in the world to share the fact that we have met with the Saviour. We may not think of our faith in "bargain" terms but in the most profound and deeply spiritual way Jesus is the best bargain we and the human race have ever had. He came to bring God's love and forgiveness, making reconciliation and fellowship with God available to all who will trust him. Free to us, but at great cost to him. This is THE bargain of all time. If we will readily share news of a special offer that might save us a few pounds surely there is all the more reason to be more openly in sharing news of Jesus' love?

Come and see

We might ask the question "How different would things have been if Andrew HADN'T gone home and told his brother about Jesus?" Well, thankfully we don't need to surmise what might have happened because the fact is he went home and shared his news of Jesus with Simon Peter and in the wonderful words of the gospel "he brought him to Jesus." There were going to be lots of ups and downs along the way. Peter was to have high points and low points in his faith journey but this was a turning point for him and for his spiritual journey. Andrew came home with news of the Messiah and Peter went and saw for himself. He met with Jesus, and he wasn't disappointed. I want to suggest to you that while there may be all sorts of reasons (including the culture and ethos of our society, our own personality and our faith) why we may not be well disposed (or equipped) to be ardent evangelists we are all given a share in this ministry shown by Andrew in John chapter one – a "Come and See" ministry, a ministry of invitation. It is based on the fact that the Holy Spirit of God draws us to meet Jesus and to know his love and forgiveness and having experienced even a touch of his love upon us to give us the incentive to pass that on to others in the hope that they too will come and see for themselves. For all we can experience pointers to the love of God in creation and in the world at large the fact is the gospel is only fully known when human beings pass on to others the good news of Jesus Christ in both word and action. We are not Billy Graham's, we are not going to hold the attention of thousands and be great orators for the kingdom but if have met with Jesus, however tongue tied and hesitant we might be, we are capable of letting others know that we've met with the Lord Jesus and capable of inviting them to come and see for themselves.

Now, I know that inviting people to a church service is not the same as them necessarily meeting with Jesus – you can do that in lots of settings, and some informal

ones are maybe more effective. (Actually, I think that is probably why Alpha and similar groups have been a valued means of introducing people to Jesus – because of the informality and ease with which questions can be asked and answered). But, the fact is church is still an opportunity for people to come and meet with Christians in a worship setting, to hear the scriptures (and especially the stories of Jesus) read and explained, to experience Christians praising and praying and picking up on the fact that there are people who really believe that Jesus is alive today, relevant for our day and age and not simply a relic from the past. The church is not Jesus and as I've said before we are a work in progress – this is not heaven! But compared to the community at large, where very often matters of faith are not given the light of day, a worshipping congregation is still a strong pointer to Jesus Christ. But rather like John the Baptist's willingness to step out of the limelight and point his followers towards Jesus, and Andrew's readiness to invite his brother to Jesus (and to step back and allow him to play his full part in Jesus' ministry) we should all be open to the Spirit's prompting to share our experience of Jesus and his love and forgiveness and invite others to come and see for themselves (whether that is in the church on a Sunday morning or in some other more informal setting). The fact that we have met with Jesus is to some extent the only qualification that we need (though God has a knack of providing far more equipping and sensitivity to us as we are willing). We are all different – our style, personalities, and the ways we approach others and indeed the variety of our circles of friends, neighbours and acquaintances mean that together we can reach out to a huge cross section of the population that will never be reached if we limit our efforts to those who turn their collars round the wrong way or the few who can pull in the crowds.

Are you or can you become an “Andrew” – someone young or not so young, male or female, perhaps reticent, retiring or reluctant – but someone who has met with Jesus and known something of his love and who has sufficient faith to realise that you have something precious that you can share with others – that you have met with Jesus and been touched by his love – and that we realise that this isn't something you should keep to yourself? Are you willing to respond to God's call to share, however simply, that good news? Come and see. Make use of your faith, however simple, however “weak” and exercise that ministry of invitation – to Jesus, to his people – and who is to say that your efforts, feeble though you might deem them to be, might lead to somebody else coming to know and love Jesus for themselves – and who is to say where all that might lead?

May the Lord bless you! Amen