

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 5th May 2019
Easter 4 YrC

Acts 9.1-20; Revelations 5.11-14; John 21.1-19

Follow me!

I wonder if you can pinpoint when you became a follower of Jesus. Any good Anglican would of course say 'at my baptism' or even 'at my confirmation'. That's not really what I mean. I suppose I mean when you consciously decided or realised that Jesus was central to your life. When you were able to stand back and say, honestly and definitively, I am a Christian, Jesus is my Lord and Saviour.

There is no definitive answer to this question. For some coming to a full realisation of faith will have been a long slow burn. Over time, through life changes and experience we have slowly and surely taken steps, sometimes big ones, sometimes little, towards a deeper relationship with God. Some will be able to pin point an exact day, date and time (4th April 1977 at about 10.30pm). For us all the journey off faith and exploring what Jesus means to us should also be ongoing. How we will have met Jesus will be different each time.

In our readings from scripture today we have examples of different ways God has come into the lives of the faithful. Paul's first meeting with Jesus is the original 'Road to Damascus' experience. Pow! Knocked off his horse and there is the risen Christ – Saul why do you persecute me? – and because of the experience Paul knew straight away who was speaking – he called Jesus 'Lord'. I suspect, from the beginning of Paul's or should I say Saul's appearance in the Christian story, when he was holding the coats of those who stoned St Stephen to death, he had some suspicion there was something in this new Way, in some way the Holy Spirit had already begun to speak to his heart. But that is for another sermon. Paul has this instantaneous engagement with Jesus that changes his life for ever; indeed changes the world for ever.

John of Patmos' encounter with Jesus is perhaps more difficult to pin down. This is a revelation in the apocalyptic tradition. Here John has a vision that brings him an understanding of not just who Jesus is but the cosmic implications of that revelation, who Jesus is in the context of creation, of the universe. This is less a case of John's first encounter with Jesus; more a

deepening of his understanding; something that should happen for us all in our continuing life of faith.

The gospel story is a little more the norm of a new or renewing of an engagement with God. The apostles knew Jesus had risen; they had seen him but maybe they hadn't understood. News of Jesus resurrection had already been received by them; Peter and John had themselves been to the empty tomb and seen the folded grave clothes and the body gone. After this we have the three appearances John's Gospel tells us of. First there is the appearance to Mary Magdalene; then to the disciples gathered in a locked room and finally the appearance to Thomas who is asked to touch Jesus' wounds. But as it says in John 20:9 they didn't understand. They were still on their journey of realisation.

Jesus comes again. We know it is the risen lord because several miracles happen in this story; the draft of fish, the breakfast he provided, above all the healing and reviving of his followers' hearts and the changing of their lives.

We all come to Jesus in different ways. This forty days of Easter, mirroring the forty days of Lent, is a time when we are encouraged to think about our relationship with the risen Lord; to think about how he is part of our lives and what that means for us; perhaps to think about how we might want him to be part of our lives and inviting him in. Like the apostles in our gospel today Jesus wants us to change our lives too. To hear him and receive him. As we hear and receive him, as we utter the words of John, 'It is the Lord' we also need to hear Jesus' final words for us in today's Gospel. They are words spoken to Peter and it is through Peter we receive them too; 'follow me'.