

Epiphany 3 Matthew 4:12-25

Last Sunday our gospel reading spoke of the call of Andrew and Simon Peter in the account attributed to St John. Today we have the account of the call to ministry of the same disciples along with James and John, in the gospel attributed to St Matthew, and the circumstances are very different.

In John's gospel, John the Baptist called out in the street, as Jesus passed by, that Jesus is the Messiah and Andrew heard that call and followed Jesus. Later, Andrew told his brother Simon that he had found the messiah, Simon went with Andrew to see what all the fuss was about and Jesus went back to stay with the brothers at which point he renamed Simon, Peter, the Rock.

In Matthew's gospel, Simon and Andrew were fishing and Jesus directly invites them both to follow him promising that he will make them fishers of people. Immediately afterwards Jesus calls James and John who leave their father Zebedee, with whom they had been mending nets, and all four men follow Jesus.

So, there is no way both of those accounts can be right, is there? How can both descriptions of the same encounter be true when they are so different? It is vital that we acknowledge that the bible is not without contradictions. There is no way that we can deny or try to avoid this reality and it is a real sticking point for people coming to faith, how do Christians put their faith in a book that contradicts itself? On the face of it that's a fair question but it fails to understand deeper truths.

The first thing we must understand is that the bible, although bound together for our convenience into one book, is not in fact a single book, but far better described as a library of 66 books, 39 of which are from the Hebrew testament or Old Testament dating from before the birth of Jesus, and 27 from the New Testament detailing the Christian response to Jesus' life and ministry. Each book is written by an author, some authors wrote more than one book and each book takes on a different style and character based on its purpose. There are books of history, poetry, song lyrics, biography, personal letters, prophecy and apocalyptic visions.

Rather unsurprisingly, then, we receive a wide variety of literature in our bible and some authors come with different experience, bias, interests and with different audiences in mind than others, so their telling of the same event doesn't always sound the same. It would be just like a number of people being interviewed in response to a newsworthy event. Depending on where they stood, what they expected to happen and what message they wanted to communicate, the interviewees may have very different recollections of the same event. The further back in time the event took place, the more divergent the accounts become as memory plays its part also.

The second thing we must keep in mind is that we, as Christians, do not put our faith in a book. That might sound controversial to some, but however centrally we place the bible in

our practice of faith, I think we can all agree that it is in Christ alone that we put our faith. The bible is one of a number of foundations upon which our faith is built, but it is not the only one and it is not in and of itself the thing in which we put our faith.

The Anglican church is traditionally based on a three-fold understanding of authority in the church of scripture, tradition and reason. Like the legs of a stool, no single element may be longer or shorter or of more importance than the other or else the church which stands upon these legs will be unstable. So a faith that ignores reason or tradition in favour of taking only what we read in scripture as a foundation, is less robust and not really Anglican at all, by any accepted measure of the particular faith of the Anglican Church.

With that in mind, when scripture is contradictory of itself we must use reason and tradition to balance our understanding and in this case tradition tells us that all 4 gospels are a part of our faith and must be read as equally valuable to understanding the life and ministry of Jesus. Reason tells us that Andrew and Simon Peter cannot have had both encounters with Jesus, and yet, also that AN encounter with Jesus took place. That all 4 gospels acknowledge the calling of the 12 disciples and their ministry with Jesus, the deeper truth is that an encounter with Jesus occurred for these people, and however it happened, it fundamentally changed the course of their lives. They physically left behind jobs, family, friends, the known, and stepped in faith to follow a stranger with whom they experienced uncertainty and confusion but also a glimpse of the divine which was utterly transformative.

That is what today's gospel tells us, that is what last week's gospel reading told us, that is the deeper truth lying at the heart of all scripture, and particularly the gospels. When we encounter God, through Christ, we are utterly transformed, however it happens, at whatever age, whatever our previous experience, the course of our lives is changed and we follow the call of the one who gives life. May we all continue to study our bibles ever seeking the deeper truths bound up in the stories found within finding the authority for all we do as a church on that three-fold Anglican image of scripture, tradition and reason as we go out from this place to follow where Jesus' call leads.

Amen.