

Hi everyone, welcome to Tuesday evening sermon here from Brightons Parish Church. It's really great to share in this time with you tonight.

We do have something a little bit different tonight and in the coming months probably up until around about Summer, July time, and we'll be looking at the life of Peter, but it's not going to be me that's taking you through that journey, my good friend Gordon Elliot who preached the first Sunday of January and started our series in Philipians.

Gordon is coming back each month to lead us through this study in the life of Peter and Gordon will lead us through that. Bringing a word each month and just to try something new, something different to give us a different voice, to give someone of a different age and experience to myself and to take us through a series over that time, and to give space from month to month to reflect to put things into practice, then come back and get a little bit more input on that theme, and I think that what Gordon will share will also tie into where we're at as a church, where we're at with our Values and our Purpose, as well.

So I'm going to hand over to Gordon now and invite him to come and lead us in our first sermon with him tonight.

Can I say wherever you are and whoever you are, thank-you so much for this invitation to take part in your monthly home group bible studies. It's all a strange experience for me standing up here and only just talking to Scott, but he assures me there are people out there.

Over the next few months, once a month, we're going to just be looking at the life of Peter and that will also include some of the other disciples and people that he meets etc, but that's generally the thrust it will be through the life of Peter, but before we read together let's just pray together.

Father, we thank You that Your word is not just a time in history about a people or people, individuals, that we know or think we know, but we just pray that You would help us to see ourselves in and through them, as to what You taught them, that You might teach us.

We again just thank You for the open bibles that we have and just pray Your richest blessing on our times together in Jesus name, Amen.

Our reading, our first reading is going to be in John chapter 1. John chapter 1 and reading from verse 35.

John's disciples follow Jesus. "The next day John was there again", that John, of course is John the Baptist, "with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by he said "Look the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around Jesus saw them following and asked "What do you want?" They said "Rabbi (which means Teacher) where are you staying?" "Come here" He replied

“and you will see.” So they went and saw where He was staying and they spent that day with him.” this wasn't just going to be a brief conversation. “It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him “We found the Messiah (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas (which, when translated, is Peter). The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. “Nazareth! Can any good thing come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said to him “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared “Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.” Jesus said “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added “Very truly I tell you. You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

**So,** these are our some of our first introductions to some of the disciples and very briefly to them, to Peter himself.

Almost two years ago my wife and I celebrated our golden wedding anniversary and we were over in Ireland at the time. Our eldest daughter and her family live over there and our son and his family, who actually live in Spain, they had come over. Likewise so, my youngest daughter and unfortunately she was even further afield in Vietnam so she couldn't join us, but we were going to have a family reunion with just one or two friends and they had organized just like what we thought, my wife and I thought a get-together for lunch, and we went down to the church where I used to be the pastor to pick up the wife of the friend that was going to take us to Ballymena, not far out of Belfast, and we went into the church and waited and then to our shock and amazement, I can tell you it was a shock and amazement, 80 people just suddenly appeared from round the corner.

We had been caught out and caught on. We had no idea that this had been planned. I presume we thought our kids didn't have it in them, but they obviously did, and even the grandchild, nobody had spilled the beans, we got no wind of it, and as we looked around these people, and got over the sense of shock and surprise, I looked around and just looked at some of the faces. Most of them I did recognize, one or two had grown older like myself, but some of them I hadn't seen for years, and I mean in years, but what we could say about all of them, they were all friends.

Where we had become friends were quite different. Some were through the church in the Antrim Baptist where I'd been the minister; thers woere family friends and even to our bigger surprise was Margaret's nephew and his wife, flew over from Bristol just to be with us. But that's another another story.

But as we looked around, all the memories that were stirred, memories that were happy memories, that were difficult. Here were people that I had ministered to and ministered with and it's very hard sometimes to look back and you see people's faces and you know a lot about them that nobody else knows. That's one of the privileges, sacred privileges, of being a minister.

But I wonder if you've ever taken stock of your friends? Whether they be friends in the church. And you're longing to see people again like most of us? Or whether it's people in your neighborhood or people that are away from you? To take stock of how your friendships came about. What were your first impressions?

Because we're going to look a bit about the first impressions of Peter. Because when you look at the disciples that we're going to look at, initially they were a real motley crew and you sometimes can look and wonder "Why did Jesus pick them?"

As I looked at these friends of ours, and some of them had had really difficult backgrounds and I went through some very tragic and very difficult pastoral situations with them, but they've now become very close friends, not all of them, but all of them we know and we were astounded.

I wonder if you've ever sat down, now I've never done this, but I wonder if you've ever sat down and tried to count the number of friends you have or people that you know or even more so, how many people you've actually met and known over the last 50 years, the last number of years? Now that just is probably totally out of order, I wouldn't even attempt to do it because you'll notice that some people that have come into your life stay in your life and they become good friends, and a lot of these people they had been in my congregation, so it was more like a pastor and his flock, or some of them where now it's very much I'm no longer a pastor there, but it's now very much people or myself and people who are very strong friends, and you build relationships.

Now, when you look at the apostles, and we're obviously not going to look at them all and we're not going to even look at a lot of Peter's life tonight - yes it would be tonight wouldn't it that as to How did they come to Jesus?

Have you ever asked even your close friends How did you find Jesus? How did you come to know Jesus?

Now, we can get so used to people that we think we know, but during these days of pandemic, when we're away and longing to just meet with people, maybe you need to think again and say I wonder how so-and-so found Jesus? and prepare some questions. You don't have to wait until the pandemic's over. You might wait a while but you could always text them, email them, phone them, and just ask after the bible study How did you come to know Jesus? and it may be told, you may be totally shocked but ask questions of your friends, ask questions of the people that you would normally worship with, or others that are outwith this congregation but part of another

congregation, and it's very interesting when you see even briefly in the portion that we read together, the different ways that they came to know Jesus.

You've actually got Andrew and John, John the brother of James, Andrew the brother of Peter, they heard a preacher, that preacher was John the Baptist, and it was just some words that he said as he pointed to Jesus who was obviously in the background said "Behold the Lamb of God" and he went on to say and describe later on "who takes away the sin of the world" and Andrew and John left John the Baptist and followed Jesus, and they spent some time with them. We don't know exactly how long.

Some people just don't have the time or don't want to make the time but perhaps again it's a time for you to get to know Jesus, to get to know what he's done in your life, what he's done in other friends life. So you need to spend not just a passing few moments but some time now. We don't know what the conversation was all about but one thing we do know is the result of the conversation, they found that this was Jesus the Messiah. They heard a preacher John who then led them to Jesus and what Jesus said to them as I said we don't really know, but we know that they had found Jesus.

The influence of sermons, the influence of preachers, the influence of people who have this tremendous power into our lives, to bring us to Jesus.

I don't know, again I hardly know any of the people here, so I don't know how you found Jesus, and perhaps it's worthwhile looking back whether you're young or whether you're old, to look at the influences on your life.

People heard a preacher, and then as we go into Peter himself it wasn't so much the preacher he heard at this time but he heard a testimony, he heard the testimony of Andrew his younger brother, well we think he was his younger brother, and John, and he just says "We found him the Messiah." So they heard a testimony that would probably be more my initial way of coming to Jesus.

I worked in the civil service many years ago and I was really, I'm trying to think how old I was, but it was many years ago anyway, and it was through the testimony of two people I worked with. They belong to the Salvation Army in Leith in Edinburgh and it was their lives and their works. One was a young typist girl and she was actually leaving the office. She was only there for a few months but she was going on to train to be a Salvation Army Officer. Now I've never heard anybody speaking the way they spoke about Jesus and their faith, but I had a testimony and through their testimony I started to go and attend the Salvation Army in Leith and that's where I became a Christian.

How did you find Jesus? Was it somebody witnessing to you? Was it someone even in your family, even as a child your Sunday school teacher, who they might not regard themselves as preachers, but in one sense they are bringing the Word of God?

It's very interesting to find out the different ways that people have found Jesus. We'll come back to that at the very end.

So some heard a preacher, some heard a testimony and, when it comes to Nathaniel and Philip, they were, it was quite different again. With them it was almost as though the Lord spoke directly to them. Perhaps they're not used to that, that somebody says "You know how I found Jesus, because He spoke to me."

I was reading the Bible which is His Word and through that message I found Him.

You could almost say that Nathaniel also was really spoken to by Philip's testimony.

What's also interesting, and we maybe haven't got too much time to go into it all, you take it for yourself, but what did they hear about the Lord. I'll just touch on it briefly later on.

And some of the phrases that are used even in this short passage. So, they heard the Lord.

Some needed time. John and Andrew just wanted time to spend with Jesus and to hear what he said and those words that John the Baptist said "Look the Lamb of God" and that's what drew them. To find out what did he mean.

**Now** imagine the conversation, don't be afraid to imagine what they talked about, and I'm sure it wasn't just about the weather and I'm certainly sure it was not just about COVID etc. So, that's all we seem to talk about nowadays.

They wanted to hear Jesus but through His word, through His message, not only did they find Jesus, but they started to testify and to witness to Jesus, and to Andrew. It was to his brother and we'll look at this again in a moment. They were very different, as many brothers are very different.

Take this time take this time to ask yourself and to find out or to remind yourself who was influential in my life. Who was influential in other people in the congregation in their lives. What's our first impressions of these disciples?

Well, as I said earlier, when you look at them and when you look at them later on we don't hear an awful lot about Nathaniel and Philip but you really at times wondered what was Jesus thinking of in asking them to become His disciples, to join with Him, to lead the ministry with them. And you may look at some people around your church, in your congregation, you're thinking Well there's not much in them. I can't understand why Jesus would have called them. Because you don't see what the Lords maybe doing in someone else's life. Ask them, because these are the people they may not be the closest of friends but they're the people you worship with, or people who are your friends and who have had a lasting impression upon you, and you are now good friends, like some of the 80 people that we met at our surprise golden wedding celebration, but not everybody's like that, You obviously know that Peter and Andrew and John, Nathaniel and Philip and others of the disciples, were bonded together as this group.

But you know, not everybody stayed together. Have you ever looked around the church and wondered where is so and so, I haven't seen them for a while, and yet I thought they were going on well with the Lord. But if you read through the Scriptures you see people that literally just pass, almost pass through Jesus's life, and we don't know what happened after that.

Take for example Zacchaeus, now he obviously heard something, maybe it was from other tax collectors, but he was so keen to see Jesus. Being small, he did what was really unacceptable for a man of his standing to, climb a tree and he just thought he was hidden because nobody wanted to know him, but Jesus did, and after that incident we don't know what happened. You ever wondered what happened to Zacchaeus after? What about the little boy that brought his loaves and fish? What happened to him afterwards? No doubt he went home to his mum and said "See that lunch pack you gave me today, do you want me to tell you what happened to it?" Oh yeah, what happened to him after that? We just do not know.

And there must be people in your life, as there are people in my life, that they've been part of my life at one time, they may have even had an influence and I have no idea what they're doing now years ago.

I used to play tennis, not very well, I but I played with this guy and it was only years later I found out he was a Christian, and I really went at him, not roughly, and said "You never ever told me that you were a Christian." I wasn't at the time were probably that busy trying to play tennis and his now wife was in my classes at high school, he wasn't, he was a couple years younger, but he'd never said anything until we met later at some Christian meeting. He had never shared a thing with me.

But, of course, it's not up to us to even be those witnesses. The Lord can move in our hearts. So, search through the Bible and look for some other characters and thinking what happened to so-and-so and maybe do a Bible search and you might be find you don't know anyway. Those are the first people that we we're looking at tonight and yes just think what are your impressions. What are your impressions about Peter?

We'll certainly look more at him in days to come and months to come, but the people they were, and, again, we're not going to spend a lot of time in this, but when you look at them and you see them, and they were young people, not terribly young well as far as we know there was no one as old as me, I don't know, but no I don't think they would have been but when you look at their characteristics, there's that Peter, now we know that Jesus even here calls him the Rock but you know he was a coward. There were times when he really was a miserable coward. Liar, swore and cursed, and he had a boldness with him. Sometimes he opened his mouth just too soon and too quickly. A boldness, but he was also a denier.

You know when we look around at one another in any fellowship none of us are perfect and we can undermine one another and somehow I think that we should all be on a

perfect road of following Jesus and then you're shocked to hear of someone who well "I never thought that would come out of his mouth, I never thought he would ever do something like that" but we do. You don't know my life, I don't know your life, thankfully.

But here the first impressions of Peter and those impressions go on through the different gospels I don't know if I'd wanted him on my team until you realize what the Lord did in his life.

Look at other people through Jesus eyes and there may be someone that you know in this congregation that just needs that encouragement, needs that word, to just draw alongside them and help them to grow in their faith. When you look at the two brothers, well Peter and Andrew very different - Peter this bold, brash, sometimes very insecure, sometimes as cowardly - and Andrew who seems to be very quiet, I would reckon, because I don't know him that much, but trying to read into the passages he seemed to have more stability and he was certainly an evangelist. Everytime you see Andrew he's leading or pointing someone to Jesus. The brothers were very different and obviously Andrew lived in the shadow of his brother, but there doesn't seem to be that spark of jealousy, he wasn't one of the top three.

So, remember as you look around your congregation, as you look into your own life, you may not be one of the top three or one of the top 103. Does that matter? It's who you are and the characteristics that you have. So, you've got this quiet, perhaps timid, young man.

You've got these fiery brothers, sons of thunder, John and his brother James. Again, I may be misjudging, but perhaps Philip was a bit uninspiring. We don't hear very much about him.

Nathaniel, we again don't hear very much about him, but what if you read into it seems as though Philip and Nathanael were friends and very perhaps very possibly met together for Bible study because when you read together, let me find it again,

Yes down in verse 41 the first thing Andrew did was find his brother and he brought him to Jesus, And the next day you find Philip and Nathaniel, and Philip found Nathaniel, and told him "We found the one Moses wrote about in the law." Had they been discussing something through the Old Testament over that week. We don't know, but it looks as though they were and about whom the prophets also wrote Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph and it looks as though they were a couple and maybe others who were just looking and searching in the word of God.

Read between the lines and don't worry if it never happened, you'll never know until you get to heaven, but read what's not there and see how these people were going to be molded and then when you do this, these are all sermons in themselves, but when you see what words they came out, just in this short period of time, as I said Andrew said to Peter "We found the Messiah, the promised one" Incredible. John the Baptist said to Andrew and John "the Lamb of God".

Nathaniel picked up the theme "You are the Son of God. The King of Israel."

Philip picks up the fulfiller of prophecy, you know, take time to read what these men were being impressed with. What there was happening in their lives.

Again, let me take you back to my church in Northern Ireland and Antrim. When I look not just with friends that we had in Northern Ireland, when I look at some of the people, then when I first got to know them, and not really know them, you can look with a bit disdain or a bit critical. Believe it or not, even ministers do that.

There was a guy called Bertie, big tall guy, he was a policeman actually he was quite high up in the police. I won't mention other family names but he won the Queen's Medal for Gallantry and they don't just hand those out. I don't know all the incidents but it was still quite impressive and yet when I looked at Bertie, and we still look at Bertie, he was one of the people that they were at the 80 they traveled over from Donegal, and I didn't recognize them at all, but I didn't have I would have put it. When I looked at Bertie in those first days he didn't impress me as a particularly spiritual man, and not terribly critical and he was, I think never at the prayer meeting, and perhaps, because of his duties, he didn't get too involved in church life, perhaps because of the job he did, but you know that man and his wife, who was a nurse, now live in the Republic of Ireland and minister not as a minister but as Christians in an area where there are very few Christians, and they've gone through really difficult times, but they are a very spiritual couple.

Who am I to make impressions or to feel impressions that become totally wrong?

Another friend called David, still see him from time to time, and he's a right laugh, he's one of these people when you get together he and his wife and me and my wife, you always have a good laugh together. When he was younger his mother seemingly took him to the doctor thinking there was something seriously wrong with them because he couldn't speak. There wasn't anything wrong with him, but he was no academic, he was no big top-notch theologian, but he ended up with his wife, as missionaries to Peru. My first impressions and still my impressions of David "How did he ever get through Bible College?" but he did.

Your impressions can be wrong, but when you get to know people.

There's another David, and when we first got to know him, he was really a bit of a mixed up kid, but he spent a lot of time coming to our house some nights they think "Oh no, we're going to be here all night" - he needed a lot of help but he was seeking. Now that David and his wife, as she later became, became missionaries to Africa and now they're actually, believe it or not, Presbyterian minister retired. I would never in a million years have dreamt that David would have ended up like that.

Our first impressions of people can be so, so wrong, but the blessing I've had and, as I look at these 80 people, was to see how the Lord had had taken many of them on into



different ministries, to bringing up families, to being part of their churches. Some, no doubt, wandered away but for the majority of them, the words fail me, became very real in each of their lives.

So, in these days of lockdown, take time to think of the friends you have around you. And I start to think what questions would I like to ask that I don't know about them. What impressions do you have that may be totally wrong?

Now I know, particularly Scots, we don't like people interfering into our lives or what we think is being nosy. It's not, it's to encourage one another in the fellowship and it may just be a phrase or something that you say that will make them search as to who this Jesus really is.

So, in finishing, I've got some homework for you. Now I promise you, I will not be taking it in and marking it. It's really for something I normally be asking have you done or not done it, but here's three things hopefully we might have them on the screen so you can take them down.

Share your testimony - share your testimony with how you met Jesus share it with someone else.

Who were the people of influence in your salvation? Who were the people of influence in your salvation? For me it was the two people initially who were in my work and belonged to the Salvation Army who have never seen for, well the older man's dead now, but praise God and give thanks for them, even if you haven't seen them. Just stop and give thanks.

And then thirdly and lastly, Who are the people you are now seeking to influence for their salvation, that you may want to share your testimony with, that you may want to share Jesus with, that you may want to teach or preach or bring the word of God to?

So, there's three little suggestions to give you something to work on and do take the passage before us. It's thrilling, I'm always thrilled by the word of God. Even as I'm reading, I'm thinking "Oh I never saw that before" and I'm always being like any minister you think you want to go off on a tangent but I haven't so take time to read and you'll pick up even just these few characters and maybe your impressions of them will totally change and maybe your impressions of someone in your congregation or a friend out with the congregation may totally change and they will be helped and encouraged and the Lord will be glorified.

Scott would you come and pray with us.

Having heard Gordon preach tonight and what he brought from the Lord to us from the Scriptures, let us now take a moment to pray. Let us pray.

Our God and Heavenly Father, thank-you for Your word, thank-you that You are the living and active God, the great I Am, that you are ever present and ready to speak to us, Father for Your faithfulness and Your goodness to us and this we thank-you and praise You.

Lord we've heard Your word opened to us by Your servant our friend Gordon and we ask Lord that we would be doers of Your word, that we would not just listen or hear but would it sink deep into our very beings changing us from the inside out, because Father, You've called us to be a church that invite, encourage and enable others to follow Jesus and how we see that in the passage tonight of others who did that, who introduced Jesus to people and Lord, we have to admit we're not good at this, we're scared of this, often we shy away from it, we shy away from spiritual conversations, but would You give us a boldness, would You help us to be people who give people that little nudge. We don't have to be a great preacher, we don't have to share a lengthy story or our message, but we can just do simple things, even and still point people towards You.

Lord, give us courage, give us opportunities, but help us also to take the initiative Lord, and to put Your word into practice.

Father, nurture in us Your way, Your ways that we might have that right focus and right attitude that we were speaking about some Sundays ago.

Father, we ask this and I and for your enabling in Jesus name, Amen

So brothers and sisters, thanks for joining us tonight for this experiment doing something a little bit different and please do take note of the questions. I'll maybe also put them into the description at the bottom of the video if you want to quickly access them, to think about how to put this into practice.

We've got Thursday Evening Live Prayer at 8 15 on Thursday and then back on Sunday as well concluding our study through the book of Philippians. So, we'll hope we'll join you then too.

I think tonight for me has really nurtured that part of our values which is about sharing, sharing the love of God through words and deed, that part of our purpose that is about inviting and encouraging people to follow Jesus, and even that enabling and sometimes enabling doesn't always mean it's easy or comfortable, sometimes we have to step out our comfort zone and so that we can help people to follow Jesus and I pray and hope that we will do that, and that we'll hear some of your stories about that in due course. If you have the opportunity to share your testimony or even just to think about what would you say about your testimony then do remember that in April we're probably looking to have another Testimony Tuesday evening and so if you would be willing to share your testimony about how you came to follow Jesus then please get in touch with me and I can help you get that recorded in time for sharing in April.

So, thanks for being with us and we look forward to seeing you again soon. God bless you.