



JANUARY

Reflections from Graham Thomas



3 January, John 1:(1-9) 10-18

We are at the outset of a story that will reveal to us the most profound mysteries of life. This story is simply about God, the glory of his character, the nature of his life and his desire to share that life with his creatures. It is about God come amongst us and the mixed response he received to his offer of divine life. IVP Commentary.

This prologue is essential in understanding what John writes about in later chapters, these themes and ideas will be expressed in his story with examples from the life of Jesus. He will use narrative that no other gospel has and he will concentrate more on the last few weeks of Jesus life.

At the start of this New year, when we still have the uncertainty of the effects of the pandemic hanging over us, two verses caught my eye;

But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves.

We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift. (The Message)

Acceptance reconnects us with God, we see Him in our reality, we become what he intended. We are completely reliant on him and he is generous in his giving, he started by giving His son.

10 January, Mark 1:4-11

John was “out there”. He was an old time prophet, he said what God told him, he was simple and direct and didn’t care who he upset. He didn’t have time for the niceties of society, he lived in the wild. Like all prophets he was passionate about God and God’s people.

Mark has no preamble in his Gospel, no birth story, no genealogies, no agenda other than this is Jesus’s story. Sometimes we think that we need to be like John to get the message across, yet we know from our own experience that this can put people off, though it has its time and its place. This is a simple story, it’s a continuation of a story of God’s relationship with people. This “chapter” of the story will change the world for ever. Mark sets the scene in eight verses, then goes on to use words like “immediately” and “at once”. He wants to move the story on.

John’s was the voice calling out in the wilderness, to prepare us, to get us ready. Paul finds a group of believers in Ephesus who had only heard “repent”. He tells them about the Holy spirit.

Did you take God into your mind only, or did you also embrace him with your heart? Did he get inside you? Acts 19:2 (The Message)

We have the full story, we have forgiveness and grace, we have met a risen saviour, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring the Jesus in our lives to others.

17 January, John 1:43-51

Jesus calls us personally. Jesus calls Phillip who in turn tells his friend Nathaniel about him. Nathaniel is sceptical of Jesus' credentials, Phillip has "bigged him up" in Messianic terms 'We've found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets'. Nathaniel knows his history and his scripture, Nazareth is not significant and he is dismissive of the whole community. Phillip, probably a bit deflated, says 'Come, see for yourself.' This second hand witness to Jesus is how most of us found out about him and we went to see for ourselves.

He chose us, no matter how we first heard. Jesus was aware of Nathaniel before Phillip talked to him, he knew him for what and who he was. Psalm 139 starts and finishes with a request for God to 'investigate my life'. God knows our thoughts and deeds, he knows them even before we have formulated them. He is aware of what's on the outside and what's inside, the good and the bad, the past and the future.

Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about; See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life. (The Message)

He chose you, you didn't choose him, His kingdom needs you as God sees you.

24 January, Mark 1:14-20

Come follow me. Last week we thought about God's choice, how Jesus chooses each one of us to be an integral part of his plan. This week we look at our response, to follow him.

We need to be aware of Jesus's imperative 'Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message'. Paul says in his first letter to Corinth, 'There is no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily. Keep it simple. Deal as sparingly as possible with the things the world thrusts on you.' He is not calling us all to full time ministry, he is asking us to simplify our lives so that we have more time for kingdom work.

Itinerant teachers of Palestine could be seen with a gaggle of followers in tow. He would stop every now and then to teach his disciples. The Rabbi would use these moments of their travels to explain and teach about his thoughts in what he saw in their encounters with life. Questions would be asked and answered, discussions and arguments would be had. Jesus is the way, the path we follow and the way in which we follow it. We were chosen, we accepted and now we have the journey of a lifetime. Let us continue to share with each other and Jesus, the reality of the life we live.

31 January, Mark 1:29-39

Jesus heals many. There can be no doubt that caring for others is exhausting, we have seen this demonstrated over the last year, with healthcare professionals, community carers, neighbours and friends and relatives. We have a limited reservoir of energy, both physical and mental, which we need to replenish before they run dry. We each have differing coping mechanisms, some people are always optimistic, others depend on harsh reality, some withdraw into themselves, we use what ever works for us.

What does Jesus do? He goes away on his own to pray - now why didn't I think of that? What characterises the whole of Jesus' ministry and the way he teaches his disciples is this reliance on prayer. I get the feeling that this is not always quiet meditation, but a real wrestle with God over the people he cares for. We read in the garden of Gethsemane that he sweated blood.

It is so easy to think "I've got this" this is within my capabilities, I do this for a living every day, it's what's expected of me as a Christian. It's not that God doesn't want a self assured people, he just wants them to be assured of His sovereign love. When we humble ourselves before God as Jesus did, we find that what Isaiah says in the Book of Comfort is true,

But those who wait upon God get fresh strength.

They spread their wings and soar like eagles,

They run and don't get tired,

they walk and don't lag behind. *Isaiah 40:31* (The Message)

