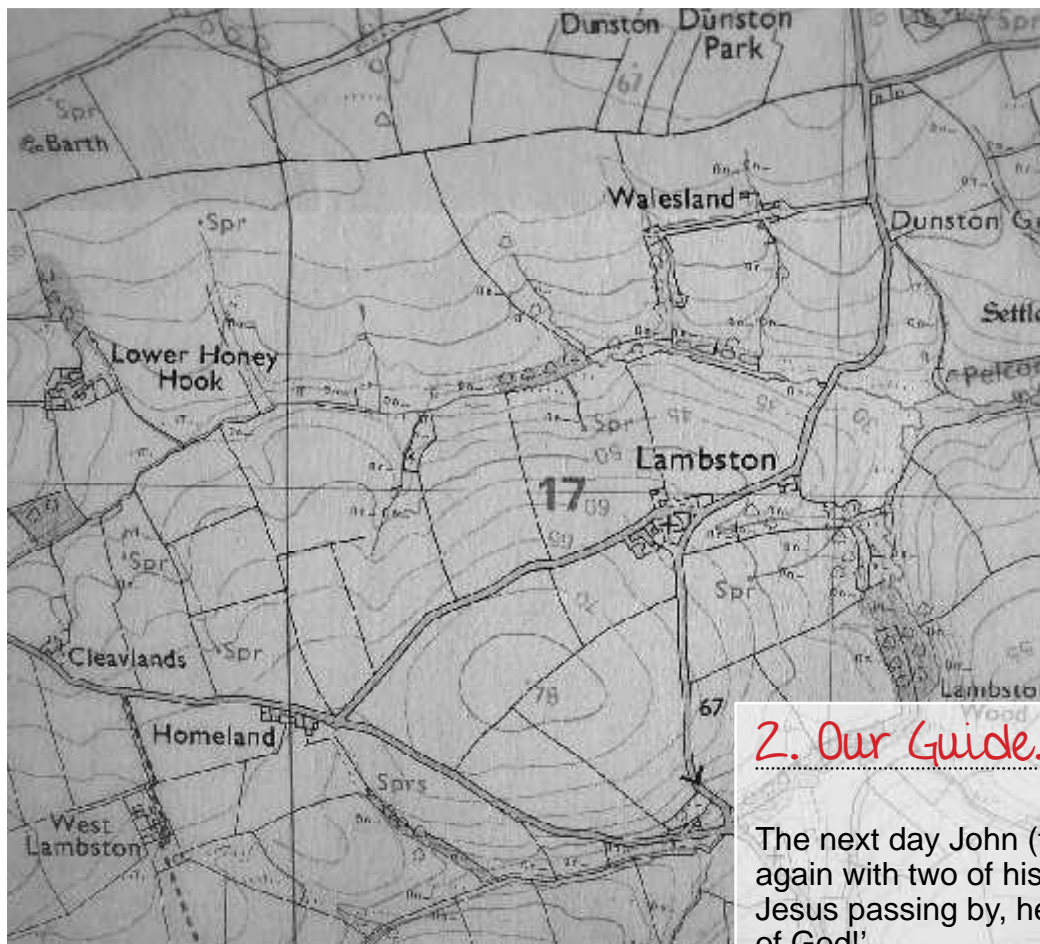




The Incredible Journey

1. Journey Planning



2. Our Guide....

The next day John (the Baptist) was there again 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 round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'

They said, 'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are you staying?'

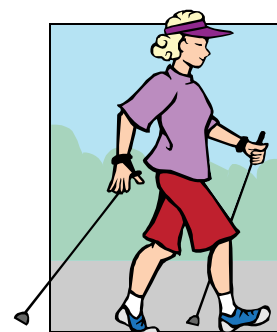
'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.'

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. 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 have 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).

(John 1: 35-42, NIV)



1. Gathering

Imagine you could take the holiday of a lifetime, maybe to somewhere you have never dreamed of going before. Where might you go, and why?

Whose is the most inspirational voice you have ever listened to, and can you remember the effect it had upon you?

'Jesus tapped me on the shoulder and said, Bob, why are you resisting me? I said, I'm not resisting you! He said, You gonna follow me? I said, I've never thought about that before! He said, When you're not following me, you're resisting me.'

(Bob Dylan)

3. Starting Points

All physical journeys start somewhere, be it browsing through the pages of a holiday brochure, becoming enthused by a travel writer's adventures, or simply having a desire to explore the world in which we live.

Spiritual journeys often begin with a heart-felt conviction that there is something lacking in our lives - that familiar image of a God-shaped hole that cannot be filled with earthly things.

Alternatively it might be the words and actions of another person which have spoken directly to our hearts, and set us on a particular path.

In order to understand discipleship, and particularly how those first followers of Jesus began their journey, we have to read a little about where their journey began, and put these verses from John's gospel in context.

Jesus asked the two men, 'What do you want?' Their answer might in part be related to who they thought John the Baptist was.

If we follow the story of John the Baptist in the Gospel of John we find a charismatic figure whose teaching attracts a growing interest, and who gathers disciples of his own.

The priests and Levites make inquiries of him, because as the son of Zachariah he was, by virtue of birth alone, a priest, and there were presumably reports reaching the authorities about the uncompromising message he was preaching.

They ask John three questions, to which he answers in the negative (John 1:19-27). They want to know if he is the Messiah, Elijah or the expected prophet, which might seem strange questions but bear in mind that as late as 250AD we are told that some of the disciples of John the Baptist talked of him as the Messiah.



In the period between Old and New Testaments there was a sense of hope and expectation in the air and when that happens people often jump too easily to wrong conclusions, but here we seem to have a

reluctance to believe the prophetic words of a desert preacher.

We could perhaps forgive the religious scholars their close questioning of John because these were big questions to which they were searching out answers, but the implications of their conclusions would be huge.

Messiah could suggest a reign of peace or perfect righteousness, but also a military hero, a supernatural figure and a prince of David's line. The Jews also believed that before Messiah came Elijah would appear again to herald his coming, sort out petty disputes, and separate out that which was clean or unclean

'See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.' Malachi 4:5 NIV

There was also a belief that a prophet such as Jeremiah or Isaiah might appear before the Messiah arrived.

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.' Deuteronomy 18:15 NIV

John the Baptist is not interested in all this detail. John sees his mission as one of simply pointing ahead to the One who is to come.

It's a compelling mission which has attracted the interest of at least one person who will become a familiar name in the gospel message, the fisherman Andrew.

Some commentators have suggested that the other man mentioned might have been John, the writer, as he ends the little passage about that meeting with Jesus by adding, 'It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.'

For many it is important to remember the moment that they encountered Jesus for the first time and began a journey of discipleship.

Andrew is an interesting character, not least because he seems to have been happy to

remain in the background. He seems to be mainly remembered as the one who introduced others to Jesus (see also John 6:8,9 and John 12:22), and very much at ease with his brother Peter taking the limelight. Andrew, as one of the first to follow Jesus could have been jealous of others seemingly taking precedence (he wasn't there at the Mount of Transfiguration) but that doesn't seem to have been in his nature. He was happy to walk with Jesus and serve him as best as he was able, and as such is worthy of being considered a great role model.

John's Gospel adds a little extra to our understanding of Jesus in his calling of disciples. When Andrew, having met with Jesus, goes home and drags his brother Simon back to meet this wonderful teacher he has found, Jesus looked at Simon and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' which translates both as Peter or 'stone'.

It's a play on the meaning of the word here, but we often give someone a nickname, based upon appearance or nature. With Jesus it is as if when looking at us, he sees not only what we are now, but what we might become.

Jesus looked at the fisherman Simon and saw someone who would become a rock firm enough to build a church upon, for which of course he is forever remembered.

There is a story told of Michaelangelo who, when asked what he was doing as he chipped away at a large piece of rock replied, 'I am releasing the angel imprisoned within.'

Consider perhaps what talent or gifting lies within you waiting to be released.



4. Food for the Journey

Jesus asked the two men 'What do you want?' Or 'What are you looking for?'

They might have been legalists looking for discussion about the law, nationalists looking for a new military leader or two men looking for opportunities to improve their position in life. In fact their enthusiasm is to meet, talk and spend time with the one John called 'The Lamb of God!'

Abraham Maslow in 1943 produced his 'Hierarchy of Needs', usually represented as a triangle. At the bottom are the basic needs of life (food, water, work, safety and health). Higher up we find such concepts as belonging, friendship, respect, self-esteem and creativity.

It is often worthwhile stopping now and again and asking ourselves 'What am I looking for?'

5. Debriefing

1....

What does this episode tell us about Jesus?

2....

What does it say about Andrew, Simon Peter and the other disciple whose name we are not told? (It has been suggested by some that this might have been the gospel writer John, which is why he is able to be so precise about the timing of that meeting with Jesus).

3....

Where were the seeds of your interest in Christianity first sown? Do you have, like Andrew in our story, a place, date and time when your journey began? Does it matter?

4....

Is it easier today to get to the heart of what Christianity is about than it was at the beginning when the priests and Levites first asked John the Baptist if he was the Christ? What are the barriers that enquirers face today?

5....

At the time John the Baptist was preaching and Jesus appeared by the Jordan there was an underlying hope within the people that the Messiah would appear and usher in God's kingdom and rule. How would you sum up the 'hope' of the culture within which you live, and how the church might respond positively?

6....

The heart of the message of John the Baptist and Jesus at the start of his ministry was simple, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!' Is that a comfortable message for the church to preach today, and if not how has its message changed? (Matthew 3:2, 4:17)

7....

Where are the voices crying in the wilderness?