

**Second Sunday of Epiphany 2020 (19.01.2020)**

**Galatians 1: 11 – end; John 1: 43 – end**

I wonder what you would say if I asked you what your favourite Two Ronnies sketch is. I know what Mark Kunz would say. And I reckon most people would agree with him. The fork ‘andle sketch has, I think, been voted peoples’ all-time favourite sketch. And on Christmas Day, in the middle of the service, Mark presented me with my very own fork ‘andle so I forever have a visual aid for when I’m talking about the four candles on the Advent Wreath.

Now, speaking personally I think my favourite is the Master Mind sketch when Ronny Corbett’s specialist subject is giving answer to the previous question. But recently I’ve seen - on YouTube, whilst exercising all the usual academic vigour with which I research for these sermons - a Two Ronnies sketch I’d not seen before. Each of the Ronnies is in a telephone booth. In these days of mobile phones it’s difficult to think

back to what phone booths were, but do you remember that inside public places there were sometimes pay phones on the walls with a sort of transparent plastic cowl over the top of them so you had a bit of privacy? Well, in this sketch each of the Ronnies is under one of these cowls, each having their own telephone conversation, having to pause whilst the person at the other end of the line says whatever they’re saying and then answering them; and of course comedic genius is that what one Ronny says whilst the other is pausing sounds to us like an outrageously funny answer to what the other one has just said.

But it’s all dependent on us not knowing what the other half of the conversation really is. When someone’s on the phone you can only guess what’s being said at the other end. And it’s a bit like that reading St.Paul’s letters in the Bible. They’re part of a correspondence, but we only have one side of the correspondence and we can only guess what was being said in the other half of the conversation. We can

speculatively put together a dialogue. And some scholars speculate – this is by no means a main stream theory, but it is speculated – that after Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians it makes more sense if, rather than assuming that they wrote back to him and that he then answered them with what we call 2 Corinthians, it makes more sense if we imagine he wrote 1 Corinthians; they replied to him; Paul then wrote a second letter which we do not have; they sent a further reply; and then Paul's *third* letter is what we call 2 Corinthians – so really we've got 1 Corinthians and 3 Corinthians, rather than 1 & 2. Well, we'll never know.

When we read Paul's letter to the Galatians, as we have in part this evening, it *does* seem that Paul's agenda is to answer suggestions that he has been partisan or is a member of one Christian faction or another. Not a bit of it, says Paul. I am a Christian simply because I have encountered Jesus. Nobody has nobbled me. Nobody has persuaded me. Nobody's put on any special tricks.

I haven't fallen for any spectacle that anyone's put on for my benefit. Paul says that he is a follower of Jesus because of a direct epiphany, a direct revelation from God. He says: "God . . . called me through his grace [and] was pleased to reveal his Son to me."

And that's how it works. Our Gospel reading attests to it. Jesus makes it clear to Nathaniel that his faith should not be based on any extra-ordinary skill or artistry on Jesus' part, like knowing that Nathaniel had been sitting under a fig tree when Phillip spoke to him. Faith is to be founded on direct spiritual revelation, like seeing "heaven opened and the angles of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Nathaniel, though, would only get the opportunity for such an epiphany of his own because Philip had told him about Jesus and had said "come and see."

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

Between Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March and Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March this year – in just under two months’ time – all the Bishops in the northern province of the Church of England are going to be descending on the Diocese of York for an event called “Come & See.” Each Bishop is being allocated to a particular deanery and bringing a team of people with them. Here is Bridlington and the surrounding villages a retired Bishop, Graham Cray is going to be coming. There’s a whole programme of events being put on. They range from a performance by the veteran comedian Jimmy Cricket here in the Priory, through to a Question Time type event at the RSPB visitor centre at Bempton on environmental issues, with pub quizzes, kids’ craft afternoons, pub breakfasts, a fund-raising banquet for the RNLI and all sorts of other stuff in between.

These will all be opportunities for us to say to people we know “come and see” what’s going on. I’m going; it’s going to be good; why don’t you come with me? There are always reasons for not wanting to invite

anyone along. But there is no need to be anxious. All any of us is doing is giving people an opportunity to have their own epiphany. We don’t need to persuade people to become Christians. We don’t have to have any well informed or clever arguments. We don’t need to have any knock-down proofs. All we have to say is “come and see.” It’s all Phillip did and the rest, as they say, is history.

Amen.