

John 1.29-42

1 Corinthians 1.1-9

Brenda began her Christmas Day sermon quoting Malcolm Guite's Christmas Sonnet: Christmas sets the centre on the edge. The idea that the focus of Christmas and the birth of Jesus does not happen at the centre of power and influence, but at the edge of town. An obscure beginning to be sure.

I saw an obvious problem: how do you get known? How do you proclaim your message from a setting like that?

Why *not* make use of the established power structures? I wondered. After all, when the wise men came looking for Jesus following a star, they came to Jerusalem. Looking for information about this newborn king. They went to the centre. Surely that's where the action would be.

And then I read Mary's song and some commentary on it. The song that we know as the Magnificat: "My soul tells out the greatness of the Lord, my Spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour." And this is a God who has "scattered the proud in their imagination of their hearts", ... "brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" ... "and sent the rich empty away". (Luke 1.46ff)

Surely that's a bit harsh! Commentator David Runcorn suggests that "the wealthy and powerful find themselves under warning and judgement. Not because they are rich, but for how they are attached to it – confusing their wealth with importance and divine favour, and withholding it from those in need" (David Runcorn, BRF New Daylight 23 December 2025).

Maybe that gives us a clue as to why God avoided the centre and chose the edge.

It led me to think about leadership. When I look at many of the leaders around the world today I notice that the powerful and influential often seem to use their power largely to gain more power for themselves. Is this the message that God was wanting to give the world – that it's all about how to gain power over others? But when I look at so called 'ordinary' people, I often see a desire to give, to help others. If that's the edge, it certainly looks much more desirable.

In John the Baptist we see an answer as to how to get the message known, without compromising the message in the process.

John's gospel introduces John the Baptist as being sent from God as a witness to the light of God. He goes out calling his hearers to make straight the way for the Lord (v. 23) and baptises. When the priests hear of this, they come out to question him. Are you the Messiah, or Elijah, or the prophet? No, he says, but he is preparing for the one who comes after him, God's chosen one.

In his leadership, John proclaims his message, he stands up to the religious authorities, but he does not put himself centre-stage. John baptises Jesus – he sees the spirit descend like a dove on Jesus, and is reassured that Jesus is indeed God's chosen one. And look what happens the next day! As Jesus passes by, John says to some of his disciples, 'There is the Lamb of God'. And John is quite happy that those disciples then follow Jesus. He sees his leadership as pointing people to Jesus, and not to glorifying himself.

Our other reading today was from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Paul opens his letter like this: 'From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's call'. Paul's position as a leader arises from his calling. But it's not only Paul that is called but also the Christian community at Corinth. Indeed, it is *all* who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, wherever they may be. In these opening remarks Paul gives thanks for the good things he sees in the Corinthian community – their knowledge and their gifts.

But it won't be long before Paul addresses some of the difficult issues within the community that dominate the letter. It's not a question of whether the Corinthians have the necessary gifts or knowledge, but whether they know how to interpret them and use them. One commentator describes them as being 'over-converted' – their enthusiasm has led some to believe that they have already arrived at the fullness of Christian life – that nothing more can be added to them (Henry Joel Cadbury quoted in *Texts for Preaching Year A*, p105). But they are to remember that it is a partnership with Jesus Christ that they have been called into. Not just somewhere that they can settle down and enjoy the fellowship, but a business partnership with a purpose.

As a leader, Paul is looking at the strengths in the community but is not ignoring the areas that need to change.

Can we see ourselves in all of this? Called to be God's people with all those everywhere who call on God's name. And called to be partners with God in our own communities. Not to further our *own* interests but to grow God's love in the world.