



## **Module 1 – Week 2 – Encounter with Jesus – 31 May 2022**

Archbishop Porteous started the evening with a bible quiz, asking the question, “who was the first disciple of Jesus?” This was correctly answered as “Andrew.” In St John’s gospel, chapter 1 verses 35 – 42, one can read the account of how Andrew (who was initially a disciple of John the Baptist) became the first disciple of Jesus. There is sense of excitement as Andrew discovers that Jesus is the person that John the Baptist is talking about.

The topic for this week is what happens when people encounter Christ and the change that takes place in their life. The quote of Pope Benedict from last week was revisited. Andrew encountered Jesus, it gave his life a whole new direction and eventually he becomes Jesus’ apostle and a great evangelist.

John’s gospel has a few examples of people encountering Jesus. In chapter four there is the story of the woman at the well. The significance in the story (apart from Jesus talking about the living water), is when Jesus intervenes when he spoke about a very personal point regarding her life. The woman did not take offence to this. Maybe it was because she was intrigued by Jesus and there was an element of trust and openness in the relationship with Jesus. Or maybe it was the way in which Jesus spoke to her in a loving way (as opposed to a condemning and judgemental way) that the truth was given to her heart and she was able to receive it and in so doing, it set her free. Afterwards, the woman goes into town and says “Come see a man that told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” She was not ashamed to tell the people as the truth had set her free. Her life was profoundly changed because of this conversation with Jesus.

Another example is the story of the woman caught in adultery also in John’s gospel. According to the law, this woman should be stoned to death. The Pharisees and Sadducees were also trying to trap Jesus by the situation. But instead, Jesus does not directly engage but starts writing on the sand instead. Then He says that extraordinary line “let he who has no sin, cast the first stone.” When it is only Jesus and the woman left Jesus says to her “neither do I condemn you, go and do not sin anymore.” There is this act of beautiful simple mercy shown to this woman. Not only did this woman feel relief, but more than that Jesus words sunk deep into her heart.

People can get locked into a sense of their own worthlessness and the pattern of instruction of their life that have led them down a particular path thinking that they have messed up their lives. There is a sense of being a hopeless failure because of past history whereby the thought is there is no future and their destiny is determined. But just like this woman who committed adultery, her destiny was broken in a moment when Jesus said the words “I don’t condemn you” and her life took a new direction when Jesus said to not sin anymore.

“Live a new life. You can change. You are not determined by what has happened today. That is the power of Jesus to transform a person’s life.”

Just like the woman that came to the Pharisee’s house, who was crying and starts washing Jesus’ feet with her tears and wipes his feet dry with her hair. “The power of forgiveness, the power of being forgiven sets her free to love. And the love will be directed towards God. Because God has forgiven me, I am a new person and now I can live a new life.” These stories show us the power of what happens when there is an encounter with Jesus.

Then in the story of Matthew the tax collector who followed Jesus after Jesus said to him “Follow me.” After Matthew chooses to follow Jesus he throws a party that is celebratory of the life he has been set free from. Jesus impacted his life so much that he decided to leave everything aside – a radical redirection of his life.

Jesus came for the people who are struggling, the ones whose lives are not together are those that Jesus wants to spend his time with. He is willing to talk to the Samaritan woman at the well, He shows compassion to the woman who committed adultery. Jesus relates to ordinary people with all their various struggles. They are the ones that Jesus wants to engage with. People’s minds are changed, all sorts of things start to be good about their lives that were not good with their lives before.

His Grace then invited Jesse from the audience to come up and share his personal testimony of how he decided to follow Jesus since making the decision to come back to faith. He spoke of his profound life-changing encounter when he knelt down and prayed to the Lord, asking for forgiveness for not following Him for many years. He felt the Lord replied to him and said that he will for the rest of his life. Jesse also recounted the beautiful encounter of the Palm Sunday service he attended and getting to know Archbishop Porteous as a person who despite his high profile and position has been very humble and welcoming to him and cared about his faith and his spiritual journey. Jesse also mentioned getting to know the members of the parish community and seeing the fruits of the Holy Spirit through different people and how this inspires him to do continually strive to be good and give honour and praise to God.

To conclude, His Grace read from first letter of John 1: 1 -2. This passage shows that meeting the Lord has given him life. Faith brings us to life, to richness and fullness of life. One quality that gives expression to being fully alive is the quality of joy. Pope Francis said in his first apostolic exultation *Evangelii Gaudium* “the joy of the gospel fills the hearts and the lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.”