

John 1.29-42

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

This gospel reading feels a bit like it is all over the place. You've got John the Baptist, who is quite famous himself because of all the baptizing and teaching he is doing. But John is continually pointing at Jesus and saying 'look at him instead!'. You've got some strange language, including this fun sentence, that feels like a riddle: 'after me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me'. Then you have this odd exchange between Jesus and two of John's disciples,

where Jesus asks them 'What are you looking for?', and they reply 'Where are you staying?'

But the common thread in this gospel reading are the disciples - those who start out as John's disciples, and by the end have become Jesus' disciples. They are somehow at the heart of this part of the Gospel, at the centre of the story as they try to find their way to God.

Perhaps it seemed simple at first - they encountered John, heard his teaching, realised that he was a prophet, and decided to follow him. And the people of Israel were used to the idea of prophets - prophets taught and explained what God wanted, and who helped people to reorientate their lives back to living for God. Prophets were really important because they spoke words from God, and they were the ones to gather around, to listen to, and to follow.

Clearly John the Baptist was one of these people. But he behaved differently to how his disciples would have expected.

Yes, he was doing lots of the usual things that prophets did. He was calling people to repent, he was teaching and urging people to return to God. But there was something different. Because John was not just pointing to God, but he was pointing to a man. John was not gathering everyone around *himself*, to tell them

his message from God, but instead John was urging everyone to pay attention to someone called Jesus.

So when John exclaims for the second time 'Look! Here is the Lamb of God!', John's disciples decide to start following Jesus instead. Literally - they begin following him down the road. And I wonder what was going through their heads at that point.

These two disciples are really looking for something - they are seeking answers of some sort. When we look at them, we can see that they are being driven by a hunger and a curiosity. Perhaps they were searching for acceptance, forgiveness, love, or a closeness to God?

But then Jesus turns and sees them, and asks them the question outright. 'What are you looking for?'. Put on the spot like that, John's disciples didn't seem to know how to answer, other than to ask Jesus where he is staying. Because they know that whatever it is they are seeking, Jesus is the answer. Whatever is going on in their heads and their hearts, they need to be with him. They don't want to lose this man, who John says is the Son of God, so they need to keep close.

And the beautiful response is that Jesus welcomes them with open arms. He doesn't ask them to give a

coherent answer, or an excuse. Jesus simply invites them - Come and see.

Come with me. Don't just follow, but walk alongside me and let's spend time together. Come to where I am staying, where I am at home, and be with me. Come and see who I am, and what I am about. See for yourself, and find the answers that your souls are seeking. It is an invitation that is so simple, so powerful, and held out to all of us.

This small phrase 'come and see', is one that is quite special to me. It was something that stuck with me when I first thought that perhaps God was nudging me towards being ordained. It seemed like a totally crazy idea, and I thought I was not at all the right person for something like that, but this phrase kept coming back to me. Come and see. Just trust, be willing to listen, and come and see what God can do, even with you. Again and again and again, even in the doubt, in the stress, in the times when I had no idea what was next. Just come and see. So I did, and ended up here... So beware!

The phrase comes up again only a few verses later in this chapter of John's gospel - the disciple Philip find his friend Nathaniel and excitedly tells him - 'we have found the messiah! Come and see!'. So Nathaniel

does, and realises that he is face to face with the Messiah.

And it is this realisation that is at the heart of the gospel. We are all like those disciples, who are searching for something.

As human beings, we all have this sense of yearning, whether it is to be loved, forgiven, accepted, healed, or blessed; perhaps we need to be whole, to have faith, to somehow grasp a sense of peace that we see in others.

And life can sometimes, or often, be chaotic. There is always so much going on, so many things to think and worry about, to plan and manage. Perhaps sometimes we think we have found the answer in other places. In our family, job, friends, education, voluntary work, music, fashion, money, celebrities, being well-liked or respected. And these things can be good, they can even be gifts from God, but they are no more the real answer for that yearning deep in your soul than John the baptist was for his disciples.

But John does point the way. He stands next to us and exclaims 'Look! There is the Son of God'. The one who invites us in just as we are, to be at home with him

wherever he is. The one in whom we find life in all its fullness.

So what are you looking for? Is there something you are seeking? What is it you really need, not just on the surface, but deep down in the core of your being? The joy of the gospel is that the answer to our search is simple. If you look for God, he will find you and welcome you in. It is a gift given to us freely with open arms. It is the reason we gather together, to pray and celebrate, and meet with Jesus in the bread and wine. Come and see, Jesus tells us. Follow me, come and see, and I will give you rest for your soul.

Amen.