

What are You Looking For? Come and See!

If someone walks into St Andrew's, and looks around with a bemused, confused or puzzled look on their face, I expect the likely response from any one of you would be something along the lines of – Hello. Can I help you? What are you looking for? If someone has walked into the building, they are probably looking for something. It may be as mundane as a bathroom, as shelter from the weather while waiting for the bus or it may be food. It may be sanctuary. It may be help.

Jesus is walking along the path near where John the Baptist is performing baptisms in the river Jordan. John points out Jesus to some of his followers and exclaims, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" With that invitation and recommendation, two of the John's disciples, start following Jesus. Soon, Jesus turns and asks them, "What are you looking for?"

What did they want from the Messiah? Maybe they were looking for adventure, for new experiences, to see the world beyond the sleepy little village where they had spent all their lives. Maybe they were looking to make a difference, to be a part of a movement to resist the Roman occupation and the corrupt leadership of Judea. Maybe they were looking for meaning and purpose in their otherwise aimless lives. Perhaps they were looking to "find themselves," so they joined the cult of John the Baptist with visions of utopia dancing in their heads.

Scripture does not tell us what they were looking for. It may well be similar to some of the things that twenty-first-century churchgoers seek.

People come to church looking for something. Some are looking to get out of church by twelve o'clock to beat the traffic to a favorite brunch spot. Some are looking for community, for a place to belong, to connect with other people, and connect more with God in the process. Some are looking for a foundation upon which to build their lives; others for a connection with the Divine; others for a connection with the past, with what life was like when they were growing up. Some are looking for the healing of body or soul or both. Some seek redemption, a new life on the other side of mistakes made or opportunities missed. People come to church looking for many things.

Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" has been the subject of much debate among theologians and philosophers. Many will concur that human-beings long for something beyond themselves.

"What are you looking for?" People long for identity, for purpose, for meaning, for healing. They are looking for redemption, for love, for life. The world around us is ready and willing to offer solutions to the search. Media and the market offer myriad possibilities. Can it be found in a big salary and the corner office? How about in that dream house in the perfect neighbourhood? The right skin treatment or the ultimate outfit. The potential solutions are endless. The problem is that every human solution misses the life for which humanity was made.

"What are you looking for?" At our core, humanity is looking for purpose and meaning, and in a very practical way it seeks a sense of permanence amid the ups and downs, the vagaries of life and the reality of death and decay.

The author of John's gospel echoes some of this searching in other stories; in the search for bread to eat so as never to be hungry again (6:50-51), for water to drink that will forever quench our thirst (6:35) for the words guiding us to eternal life (6) and for a house with many rooms (14). Humanity seeks for that presence of God in real, tangible, "fleshy" ways.

At St Andrew's there will be many individuals who are seeking the presence of God in real, tangible ways. As life offers new challenges, we look for stability, constancy and reassurance.

Communities are much like humans. We are also search for the presence of God in real, tangible ways. We want that sense of permanence, of stability, of continuity amidst all the changes going on around us. The changes we want and those that we did not plan for.

The disciple's response to Jesus' question "What are you looking for?" was "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Rabbi, where is the divine presence to be found? Where will we find God? Where will we find you?

And Jesus says, "Come and see."

"Come and see." It is an invitation to discipleship, an invitation to follow Jesus, to find the divine. For Andrew and Simon Peter, it is an invitation to literally go with Jesus as he starts his ministry; to walk, eat, watch and learn. For us it is an invitation to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

"Come and see." It is an invitation to experience the gospel in order to understand it. To "see" or to "believe" the gospel is not merely an intellectual exercise, rather it involves the whole of the self. We need to come to it, to experience it.

We come together to experience the good news.

We have been chosen, as the disciples were chosen. Yet we must also choose to follow Jesus as the disciples chose to follow Jesus.

To choose as individuals.

To choose as community.

To listen together to the voice that calls us and to follow where it leads us.

What are you looking for? Come and see!

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Readings: John 1:29-42