

Sermon for Sunday 18 January 2026 – The Second Sunday of Epiphany – Revd Simon Pitcher

Isaiah 49.1-7; Psalm 40.1-12; 1 Corinthians 1.1-9; John 1.29-42

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There are three little conversational exchanges in the third reading that we heard this morning which caught my attention, and I wondered whether we might think about them. So first of all, Jesus says to the disciples of John, 'What are you looking for?' And in reply, they say, 'Where are you staying?' And Jesus replies, 'Come and see.' What are you looking for? Where are you staying? Come and see. So the first phrase is spoken by Jesus, What are you looking for? What are you looking for? I don't know the tone of voice that Jesus uses when he asks that question, What are you looking for? If you imagine Jesus asking you that question, what tone of voice would he be using? What are you looking for?

Sometimes it's true that we are a bit afraid to come before Jesus and imagine him looking into our face and asking us anything. Maybe sometimes we don't feel worthy or that we particularly would be welcomed or that Jesus might be judgmental or sceptical and hostile. Would he disapprove of us? There's a very moving description in a book called *God of Surprises* by Gerard Hughes, which I read many years ago, when he invites people to imagine that they're at a party and everybody's dancing and laughing and drinking and having a great time. And he says, 'Where's Jesus at that party?' And someone replies, 'He's in the corner with a frown on his face.' So if that's your imagination of Jesus and Jesus says to you, 'What are you looking for?' What tone of voice would that be? That he asks that question. Well, I don't think Jesus asks us that question in a negative tone of voice. I think he asks us that question in an understanding and welcoming tone of voice. 'What are you looking for?' What are you looking for?

So imagining that that's a welcoming and an understanding invitation to respond, where is this all taking place? The story that John gives us in the gospel reading today takes place a day or two after Jesus has been baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, the story that we heard about last week. And if the traditional place where Jesus was baptised is where everybody goes today, it's nowhere near any town or village, it's out in the wilderness. It's a long way from anywhere. It's hot, it's dusty, it's a scrubby place, and the River Jordan is the dividing line between Israel and Jordan on the other side. So I was trying to imagine in my mind, what's the setting for this conversational exchange?

I've been there to the baptism place where John was traditionally believed to have baptised folk. These days you have to go through a cleared minefield, and when we arrived at the site, there were some Israeli soldiers with machine guns on one side and Jordanian soldiers on the other

side with machine guns all staring at each other. There was a camel, there was somebody selling falafel burgers, and there was somebody selling souvenirs, and somebody else selling ice creams. There were bus loads of people coming from all over the world to come and see this place where Jesus was baptised by John. People from every corner of the globe, every language, culture, all sorts of people piling out the bus and rushing to the water's edge to see this location.

What was it like on the day that Jesus was baptised? I don't think there were any people with machine guns. There may well have been a camel, and there may well have been people from all around. There were Roman soldiers, we're told. But like I said, no settlement, no village, no town. I imagine there must have been tents, it might have been maybe a festival atmosphere. There might have been people selling food, cooking, that kind of stuff. And in this ramshackle place, this makeshift place where people are being washed and baptised by John in the River Jordan, Jesus is there. And the next day, John the Baptist is talking with two of his disciples, and Jesus walks past.

And in John's mind, there must have been a big question. He'd just baptised Jesus in the river. He'd seen heavens torn apart, and he'd seen the Holy Spirit descend like a dove on Jesus. And he must have wondered to himself, what next? What's Jesus going to do next? And he perceives that in his own ministry, he must decrease and Jesus must increase. So he says to his disciples, 'There is the Lamb of God. There goes the Lamb of God.' He encourages his disciples to transfer their loyalty and to follow Jesus. If you were the disciples of John, encouraged to follow Jesus, who you've never met until yesterday, what questions are on your mind? Who is this person? Why should I follow him? What's he going to do? What's he going to say? What's he going to lead me towards? Why should I transfer my allegiance to him?

I wonder if you have those questions, too. In your mind, do we ask ourselves, who is this Jesus? What is he for? How is he relevant to me? Why should I put my trust and faith in him? Why are we here this morning? What are we looking for? Why did we come? And so maybe all those questions are on our minds, just as they are on the minds of the disciples of John the Baptist, when Jesus turns and says to those two men, 'What are you looking for?' What are you looking for? So I want to invite you to imagine that Jesus turns to you, looks you in the eye on this morning and says to you, 'What are you looking for?' What are you looking for? Jesus doesn't tell us what the answer is. He invites us to respond with whatever it is that we are looking for. What are you looking for?

Well, I think it's quite interesting, the disciples of John don't seem to have been ready with an answer. They don't seem to expect to be noticed. So they seem to be hesitating, holding back and hoping maybe that Jesus isn't going to turn around and notice them there. And sometimes

in our own discipleship, maybe we felt like that, too. We want to follow along quietly, but we hope we're not going to be noticed. We don't get drawn into too much. We don't want to commit ourselves to anything. We'll just keep a discrete distance and see what happens to everybody else. But Jesus notices them. As he notices each one of us, he sees us, following him, however far away we may be, however close we may be or however far off, he knows. What are you looking for? And they stagger this answer, 'Rabbi, where are you staying?' It seems a very strange response, doesn't it, to the question, 'What are you looking for?' 'Where are you staying?' Where are you staying? What did they mean by that answer? Where are you staying? Well, maybe it's not such a strange answer because maybe it's the same answer as saying, 'How do we find you?' Where are you staying? Where are you? Where are you? How do we find you? Have you ever wondered that question? Where are you? How do we find you? Where are you staying?

So I think Jesus knows that the disciples of John are following him because they're searching for God. When he says, What are you looking for? He's not saying, Have you dropped your car keys or your glasses? What are you looking for? He knows that they're searching for God, searching for meaning, searching for purpose. And when they say to him, 'Where are you staying?', they say, 'Are you the one where we're going to find the answers to what we're looking for?' I think that's what's going on. What are you looking for? Where are you staying? So if you hear this morning, Jesus saying to you, 'What are you looking for?' What is your answer in your life today? Where are you? Who are you for me today?

And then, of course, Jesus invites them back. Well, come and see. Where are you? Come and see. Where are you staying? Come and see. I wonder if they went back to where Jesus was staying, what would you imagine Jesus's tent or house to look like, I wonder, what would it be like that they went back to? I wonder if you can imagine being invited by Jesus back to where he is staying. What I like about it is the fact that John tells us it's four o'clock in the afternoon, which in English terms means, come back and I'll put the kettle on and a sponge cake. So come back and I'll put the kettle on. Isn't that fantastic? Jesus is basically saying, come back and receive my hospitality, receive my welcome, spend some time with me. So the disciples of John come back to wherever it is that Jesus is staying to receive hospitality and friendship and welcome and time.

We're not told in the story what they talk about. We're not told what the conversation involves, but it involves enough that these two disciples are convinced that here in Jesus Christ is the answer to whatever it is that they're looking for. Because having spent time with Jesus, they then are able to say, Andrew goes to his brother, Simon Peter, and he says to him, 'We found

what we're looking for. We found the Messiah. We found the answers to everything that we were searching for.'

So thinking of those things, that's very encouraging for us. Jesus noticing us, noticing our desire to find him, to know him, to love him, to be loved by him. 'What are you looking for?' This week, I invite you to think about that. What are you looking for? Hear Jesus saying that to you and imagine in your hearts what you would say back to him. What would you say? How do I find you? Where are you staying? What would you say? And then having been invited by Jesus to rest with him a while, spend some quiet time somewhere this week in prayer, in silence, just pondering this passage from the Bible. Take it home with you in your Pewsheets. Imagine yourself in it and tell him what you're looking for. Tell him what you're looking for.

The other interesting thing to just conclude with is that if somebody in our community is asking those questions for themselves. Where are you? Who are you? Why should I follow you? Is it true? Where are they going to come to find the answer to that? Where are you staying? Well, the obvious answer to that is staying here amongst the people of God. So our mission together is to make him known, to share our own faith, to share together the love that we believe we found, the love, the forgiveness, the welcome, and to do so as Andrew did with his brother Simon Peter. Come see what we found to make him known together. So at the start of this year, I think we can pray for that, that we together within our own shared mission be ready and equipped to answer that question. Come and see, come and spend time here, come and find the Jesus that we're here to worship this morning.

In Jesus name, Amen.