

20<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Preacher: Jen Smith

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Hymns:     **499**   **Great God, your love has called us here**  
              **338**   **There is a Redeemer**  
              **51**     **Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father**  
              **563**   **O Jesus, I have promised**  
              **661**   **Give me the faith which can remove**

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Readings: **Isaiah 49:1-7**  
              **Psalm 46**  
              **John 1:35-42**

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### **“What are you looking for? Come and See.”**

*Holy God, break your word as bread for the feeding of our souls. And may the words of my lips and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.*

*Silence*

In our Gospel reading today, there are two people who start following after Jesus – one is Andrew, brother of Simon Peter. The other is not named – I have always wondered who that one was. Their friend John has some wild story about Jesus and points him out as he passes by, and they get curious.

I wonder, did they trail along unobtrusively – maybe hanging just a few steps back to see where he was going and what he was going to do, but glancing away if anyone looked at them?

Or did they stride along with brazen curiosity, as if armed with phones already out, to film if he did something interesting?

Today I want to look at the way Jesus approached these two people, Andrew and the other one – to tease out two questions.

One, how does Jesus approach us. Two, how should we, as people who try to follow him, approach Jesus, and other people?

And from this, I think we can get insight not just to help our own faith, but about what our church can be, and is - as a place where folk ‘come and see’ where God lives, that is, where two and three or more gather in his name.

Because at our best and even at our not quite best, church is a place where God lives – where two or three or a few more gather in his name. Where folk can ‘come and see’ for themselves what it is like to stand in the flowing river of love and compassion and forgiveness that is God’s attention.

And if church is a place where God lives, then it is also a place where people are called to follow God out these doors and into the street to 'come and see' itself, where God is going.

So first, how does Jesus approach Andrew and the other one, that unnamed one.

I heard about a self-defence class in the early 1990s at my University, where people were taught ways of defending themselves against physical assault, robbery, or other attack. (This may be apocryphal, but I want it to be true.)

This was not a class for big tough people, but for small folk. A class for fearful folk who might not have much by way of natural defences.

And the first rule was surprise:

If you heard someone coming up behind you, running footsteps, or steps getting closer on a dark street, the advice was to turn sharply and call out at the top of your voice, 'Brother are you saved! Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?'

This unexpected phrase, 'Brother are you saved!' - was guaranteed to strike fear into the heart of the would-be attacker, who would then presumably flee in terror. Result.

Or, even if not frightened enough to flee, the attacker was to be momentarily confused by this display of unexpected power, buying time for you to flee. Perhaps both attacked and attacker were meant to flee together, in a mad tangle of knees and elbows. Or perhaps the imagined assailant was no attacker at all, but someone running to catch a bus, now looking at you with a mixture of wariness, confusion, and sympathy.

I have never tried it, but I can maybe see it working. But whatever else, the one thing never considered was that any menacing person would stop and answer the question. 'Brother, are you saved?'

Jesus did not do this with the prospective disciples – he did not approach these ones following him in the street with a challenge, or a declaration - even of his love – or any formula of salvation or even anything about himself at all.

No, he started with that most surprising thing, open ended attention. Attention without agenda. Listening, without thinking how to convince or what next to argue – he met their curiosity with his own: 'What are you looking for?'

I think God still turns to meet each of us with that loving curiosity – What are you looking for? Picture yourself as that unnamed disciple, with Andrew in that street. What would you answer? Not what you should answer, but what would you answer? Because God listens.

In the passage we heard from Isaiah, the prophet is having a kind of internal dialogue – first he gives a kind of CV of all his skills and calling – God made my

mouth like a sharp sword, and etc. – but then he goes into something almost like what I hear people talk about as ‘imposter syndrome.’ He is having a bad day. What do we mean by imposter syndrome - a friend of mine sent round a meme on social media last week – ‘do you ever have the kind of day when something happens and you look around for an adult, and then you realise you are an adult, and you look around for an adultier adult?’ Or in Isaiah’s words in verse 5, ‘I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity...’ If you have ever felt not quite equal to some task in your life, then take comfort from the fact that Isaiah himself felt it too. Until, he says, ‘My God has become my strength.’

What are we looking for? We who have gathered with each other, in company with Isaiah and these first two disciples and each other – reassurance of purpose, love, comfort – assurance that we are not alone and God is God?

They answered, where are you staying? Note that Jesus doesn’t give them his address and a list of outreach events, rather he says ‘Come and see.’

In answer to our first question, how does Jesus approach us, his approach to them was curiosity, listening without agenda, and then an invitation to come and participate themselves where he lived. Not watch others do something, or just observe, but to come participate. And they came.

Jesus’ approach to them was so simple, and counter intuitive. He gives power away, he assumes nothing, he takes the first step in relationship – showing a curiosity in each of us. I think there is a model here as we engage others and share our faith.

And so to our second question, how should we as people who try to follow him approach Jesus, and approach other people?

I confess I am a Christian, in the end, because I return God’s curiosity. I respond to God’s attention. And to notice God’s love, this is what we call faith.

And to do things that allow other people to notice God’s faith, this is what we call evangelism, literally giving good news. Jesus approach was not to tell, but to ask. And then to invite.

He still surprises me. I read about him in the Gospels, and I listen as people talk about their experience of faith. I pray, I take communion, I live in this City – and as I catch glimpses of Jesus my curiosity is piqued- I want to see what he will do next.

It is not just that I want to study Jesus to find out how to live, or what to do, or who God is – though all of those are good reasons to know Jesus. Nor is it just that he does good things or makes a show – as with the signs in John, the miracles in the other Gospels.

Sometimes I am curious to tag along behind Jesus because I have a question that I want answering – like ‘if the Psalm says he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, and makes wars to cease’ why not now. Why not right now.

Why not this week.

But mainly, I want to see what he will do next, and with whom. I want to see where God lives, that is, in the midst of two or three or more who have gathered in his name. So I bring my curiosity to church, to you.

It seems to me, that curiosity is the first tool of faith – what we do with curiosity together then quickly becomes discipleship, and then ethics. Discipleship is our practice, our habit of faith. Ethics is about how we behave as church in the world. What we stand for, who we stand with. All based on curiosity.

God says ‘What are you looking for,’ and seems actually interested in the answer. And then ‘come and see,’ and to expect we will. In our own time, under our own speed, and driven by our own curiosity. And we have, in every generation, a miracle.

And it seems to me, a first task of church is to nurture that curiosity. That is, to ask creative questions of us, that might pull us up a bit short with their simplicity. And then, to listen to the answers. Some of which is what we will be doing, those who stay for the church meeting and workshops. Being provoked to ask where God is, among us, and who God is calling us to be. Not what are we good enough to be, or what can we afford to be, or are competent and skilled enough to be, but what is God calling us to be.

Because showing and sharing faith is a full part of what we are about. And we would do well to notice, and to emulate Jesus approach in our own. What are you looking for, come and see.

But there’s a last twist – there always is, with Jesus. Because God stays, God abides wherever there is need. Wherever there is love, or hope, or the smallest glimmer of light. I want to ask God today, ‘where are you staying,’ and then to come and see what God is doing in the shops and markets, and schools and everywhere else.

When the prophet Isaiah had gotten over his self reliance, and relaxed into the strength and purpose of God, then we hear, ‘it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the end of the earth.’

I have said before, if we think our purpose in church is to fill the pews, we have set our sights too low. I think Isaiah said it with more poetry.

My hope is that we learn from Jesus’ approach with these early followers first, how we should engage the world around us, but second, how God will engage us through the world.

Because we will enter the public sphere with different questions, and an agenda of love, sacrifice, service, and God’s strength. Not our own. And God is faithful.

God is at work in our world – ahead of us - in all the tumult, in the midst of the breaking and anxious times and forms to fill in and uncertain diagnoses and

heartbreaks and even in the joy – I am curious to follow out these doors and see where God is staying. The come and see is God's call to each of us, and to our church, as we seek to serve our world and to share our faith.