

what do you see/k?
a sermon preached on the
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
18 January 2015
at
st john's
ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL
by fr david moore, vicar

the lections: 1 Samuel 3:1-10, Psalm 139:1-5,12-18, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, John 1:43-51

What do you seek?¹ This is one of the most crucial spiritual questions. Immediately preceding the story given in our gospel text today is the account of Andrew and Simon Peter's initial encounter with Jesus.² Jesus asks them this penetrating question. In response to their superficiality, Jesus simply says, "Come and see".³

What do you seek? Notice that this is quite unlike the question that dominates our world – and which is so vigorously promoted in our consumer culture – what do you *want*? 'What do you *want*' is a question oriented towards self-gratification and self-satisfaction. I *want*: to be perfect; to be needed; to succeed; to be special; to know everything; to feel secure and certain; to avoid pain; to be different; to live a quiet life. To this short list you will be able to add your list of own wants.

So we notice that Jesus does not ask 'what do you *want*?' Rather, the word chosen by the evangelist is from the verb⁴ meaning to gaze upon, contemplate, view with interest and attention, to come to a knowledge of. This word relates to the deepest philosophical and total investigation the human person can undertake. It's about the complete orientation of a person's will, and the relation between that human will and the Ultimate, the Ground of All Being. It is the same word used by Matthew and Luke when Jesus instructs: "Seek first the kingdom of God..."⁵ And the same word they use when Jesus teaches about the necessity of seeking out that which has been lost.⁶

We could drop the letter 'k' and get a sharper sense of this: What do you *see*? For the evangelist employs four different Greek words all of which are all rendered into English as 'see' – and this word is one of them. What do you 'see'? means what do you discern, give your attention to, contemplate with the eye of the heart?

So what do you see/k? The spiritual life is a life underpinned by seeking – by see-ing, by contemplation, with the eye of the heart. And Jesus' response to our superficiality and triviality – indeed, to all our wants – is short and sharp: Come and see! Philip begins to get this when he also counsels the superficially-bound Nathaniel: Come and see!⁷

The word in this instance⁸ is another of those four Greek verbs. The nuance in this word points towards what is seen in the mind – interior see-ing, insight, inner knowledge. This kind of seeing is not governed by superficial detail. Beginning to 'see' in this manner means liberation from Nathaniel's preoccupation with externals - freedom even from the causal links we feel the need to make, with Nathaniel, between our perceptions and the conclusions we draw from them. Jesus' response to Nathaniel's 'You are the Son of God' declaration is blunt: You think you see because of some superficial spectacle: there is so much more to seeing than this!⁹

What about us? What do we see/k? Life in Christ is an invitation to see/k in his way – to throw everything we have at the quest for the deepest realities, to penetrate the superficial layers, to live contemplatively, to a vision of the interconnectedness of heaven and earth.¹⁰ This is the manifestation – the epiphany – revealed to all peoples. The Body of Christ is to be that community of disciples who are giving everything they have in order to see – to seek.

¹ John 1:38

² John 1:29-42

³ John 1:39

⁴ verb: **ζητεω** *zēteō*

⁵ Matthew 6:33, Luke 12:31

⁶ Matthew 18:12, Luke 15:8, 19:10

⁷ John 1:46

⁸ **ιδε** *ide* from the verb **οραω** *oraō*

⁹ John 1:49-51

¹⁰ John 1:51

Paradoxically, this kind of seeing can be more evident among those who do not frequent churches. The gospels repeatedly testify to this age-old fact of religion – time and again the religious insiders are unable to ‘see’, while various outsiders do see.¹¹ Belonging to a church can convey the false perception of having access to the ‘answers’ – being ‘saved’, being on the inside, being right. Our fixation on the church as institution – as social belonging or unchanging constant; ethnic or national identity; moral or cultural elite; institutional importance or prominence or imagined glorious history; buildings full of historical paraphernalia – such superficialities can thwart our ability to see, to seek, to *be* seekers. The building, the institution, the social belonging – all such can so readily become illegitimate substitute for the spiritual task into which we were baptised, and which is in fact the universal human vocation.

What brings us here today? What is the main driver or motivation for our coming to St John’s? What do we see/k?

Jesus’ invitation still stands. In this epiphany tide – in the light of the crib; through the waters of our baptism; at the altar of Christ; in a church anxious about its future; in a world anaesthetised and trivialised; in all the tedious and glorious detail of daily life; come and see/k!

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