

Come and See Where You Belong

A sermon on John 1: 29-42 by Nathan Nettleton, 15 January 2023

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Message

The place of belonging that we are looking for is found when we find where Jesus belongs.

Sermon

What are you looking for?

Good question.

What are you looking for?

That's what Jesus asks.

That's what he's asking you.

John said he was something special

— the lamb of God —

so you were just following at a respectful distance

to have a look.

Who is he?

What is he on about?

Where is he coming from?

“We’ll take a look,” you thought.

The lamb of God?

What was John talking about?

The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What did he mean, calling someone that?

Weird.

Normally talk of lambs and God

is about us offering some kind of sacrifice to God.

But that would be *our* lamb *for* God.

John said the lamb *of* God.

That's God's lamb.

What's John on about.

Does that mean God is offering a sacrifice?

To the world? To us?

What's going on?

Better go and have a look at this lamb of God.

So there you are

Not exactly minding your own business, for sure,

But not getting in his way either

A respectful distance

Just quietly watching, wondering

Trying to suss him out

Who is he?

Where is he coming from?

What's he on about?

Just watching and wondering,

trying to make some sense of it
Trying to make some sense of him,
of this lamb of God.

But now the respectful distance has been broken
You didn't mean to bother him
You didn't mean to catch his attention
But now he has turned and looked you in the eye
In the eye?
It feels like he's looking right through you
into the hidden depths of your soul
It is not a hostile look, not aggressive
But strong
So strong
So unnerving
There's nowhere to hide from a look like that
And now he's speaking:
What are you looking for?

It could be a casual question, those words
— You look a little lost; can I help?
But somehow it's not.
Somehow the question seems a lot bigger than that.
In fact, maybe he is saying "You look a bit lost; can I help?"
but if he is, that's a lot bigger too
Not just a chance casual encounter
A penetrating question
A question that goes deep
that cuts through until it divides soul from spirit,
joints from marrow
A question that can judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart
You look a bit lost. What are you looking for?

What are you looking for?
Now there's a question.
A surprisingly hard question to answer
What *are* you looking for?
What is it you really want?
Beneath all the trivialities and the manufactured appetites,
what are you looking for?
What is going to make the difference that you yearn for?

It can feel like the answer to that question
is to find an answer to that question
What you're looking for is to know what it is you are really looking for.
And yet somehow, here you are.
Somehow the search to answer that question has come to this
You are here looking at him
looking for an answer

And somehow you sense that he has the answer
or that he is the answer
And yet here you are
with the answer asking you the question
And you don't begin to know how to answer it
What are you looking for?

It would take a lot of guts to answer that question,
to really answer it.
First you'd have to look at yourself hard enough and honestly enough
to know the answer
but then you'd have to have the guts to reveal it as well
to be known by it
to be unmasked by it.
And yet when he asks you
it seems like he's probably got a better idea of the answer
than you do yourself
Perhaps he is the answer,
and he knows it
Perhaps, whatever it is any of us are looking for,
it will be revealed in him
It sure feels that way when he asks the question

And yet, when the question cuts through like that
suddenly we are not so sure that we want an answer
Suddenly, not knowing feels safer
It might not always be so satisfying,
it might often leave us restless, yearning,
a bit despondent even,
but it's home, it's familiar
You know how to cope with it, how to survive in it
Whereas having an answer
has implications that spin off in all directions.
If you find the answer to that question,
all bets are off.

What are you looking for?
You've got to say something
He's standing there looking right at you
Looking right through you, right into you.
What are you looking for?
You. What are you looking for?

And so you stammer out a question of your own
Rabbi, where are you staying?
And though it starts out as an innocuous question,
a time waster, a subject changer,
before it is out of your mouth
you know that it has taken on a life of its own

It has revealed more than you intended
It has been a lot more closely related to his searching question
than you ever intended.

You can see in his face that he has read the yearnings of your soul
into the nuances of your question.

Where are you staying?

Where are you at?

Where are you coming from?

Where do you have your roots down?

In the language so favoured in John's gospel,

Where do you abide?

"I abide in the Father,

and the Father abides in me,

and I pray that you will abide in me,

and we may be one."

That question — where are you staying? — got out of control.

Where do you belong?

And do I belong where you belong?

From where does your life come?

And should my life be drawn from the same well?

And you know that Jesus is not going to fob you off with a simple literal answer
— the address of his motel or something —

like you tried to deflect him with what you hoped was a safe question.

Your words are out

and they've already been unmasked

and Jesus has heard the yearning of your soul:

What am I looking for?

Where is he coming from?

And where do I belong?

And do all those questions have the same answer?

And am I ready to face the answer?

to digest the answer?

to live the answer?

He looks at you, into you,

and his answer is even more unnerving than what you had feared,

even more unnerving than an incisive philosophical/theological answer

that you had to work out the implications of.

He looks at you, into you, and says,

Where am I coming from? Come and see.

That's it.

Come and see.

Come and find out for yourself.

Come along with me and all will be revealed.

So the crunch has come

The rubber hits the road

You either take up that invitation
and follow
or you refuse it,
walk away,
and keep wondering what you are looking for
and where you belong.
You can stay on familiar ground
and try to stop the questions gnawing at you too much
or you can follow up on the invitation
and come and see.
You can take the risk of finding out
whether where he is coming from
and where you belong
are one and the same.

You want to know where I'm staying,
where I'm coming from?
Come and see.
Come.

Come and see where I'm coming from
Where the questions are real
and deep calls to deep
where the truth about life
is written in acts of love and faithfulness
and your sin, with the sin of the world,
is taken away on the wings of mercy

Come and see where I'm coming from
Where the broken hearted find healing,
where the poor and neglected
discover good news,
where blind eyes are opened,
where legs long crippled dance for joy,
where those who have lived so long
in prisons of fear and despair
see the doors burst open
and hear a voice say:
"What are you looking for?
There is freedom here.
Come and see."

Come and see where I'm coming from
where perfect love
burns with a fire that never goes out,
with a fire that burns bright
as the light of the world
Where the Father abides in the Son
and the Son abides in the Father

and the Spirit proceeds from them both
and calls us to come and see
that we might abide in them
and they in us
and the fire of love might burn in us
and we might know where we belong
and who we are
and to whom we belong.

Come and see where I'm coming from
where perfect love breaks the power of hatred and fear
where perfect mercy breaks the power of sin and bitterness
where God, far from demanding a sacrifice,
offers a sacrifice, the lamb of God,
to sate humanity's callous and voracious appetite
for making and consuming victims.
Come and see where the lamb breaks free from the teeth of death
and says to all his fellow victims,
Come and See! Come and be free!

Come and see where I'm coming from,
where I abide forever.
Come and find me abiding in the prayers of my people
As they abide in me and pray in me.
Come and find me abiding in Word and water,
in wine and bread.
Come and find me as bread is broken
and the sin of the world is taken away
and the hungry are fed
and the thirsty are filled.

Come and see
Come and see where I belong
Come and see where you belong
Come and see what you are looking for
Come and see who you are,
who you were created to be,
who you are destined to become.
Come and see.
Come!