**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? John 1.38 (35-42)**

*My name is Andrew. I’m 19. I live with my family in Bethsaida at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. We look right down the length of the lake, and if that isn’t a foretaste of heaven I don’t know what is.*

*We’re fishermen in our family. My brother Simon and I should take over the family business eventually. They say there are over 200 fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee. That’s a lot, but most of us make a decent living. As do James and John with their father Zebedee down in Capernaum by the sea itself. John’s a special friend of mine.*

*He and I have got involved with another John recently, the one who’s made quite a name for himself by baptising lots of people in the Jordan. He really made us stop and think. He’s a complete one-off. His main message is clear: ‘Repent. Turn away from all the rubbish you’re doing. And do it now. Get ready for God’s arrival, and clear a straight path for him.’ He tells it straight, no question. Mind you, his dress sense is off the wall. And we don’t think much of his diet either.*

*Lately John has been talking more and more about his cousin Jesus, saying he’s way more important than he is himself. John, only baptises with water (which he does, with such vast quantities of water you’re not sure you’ll get out alive), but Jesus, he says, will baptise with the Holy Spirit, whatever that means.*

*Anyway, here we are, chatting with John, and Jesus wanders by. The temptation is too much. John and I excuse ourselves as well as we can, and hurry off after him. We want to tag along for a while and see why the Baptiser rates him so highly.*

*Jesus turns to see who’s following him, and that’s when we get our first glimpse of what’s special about him. It isn’t what he looks like particularly. Slightly above medium height, dark complexion, healthy Galilean face - you know the sort of thing. His eyes are certainly memorable, I’ll say that – alive, engaging, challenging, even a hint of mischief.*

*But it’s something else that halts us in our tracks. How do you describe someone who kind of ‘overflows’ the space he’s in? My brother Simon is a big personality, but this man is big in a different way. There’s a kind of fire inside him, if that makes sense. He has a presence you can’t ignore. He sort of hums with life.*

*Then he asks us a question, and it’s pretty direct. ‘What are you looking for?’ he asks. As blunt as that.*

*Now, we could have answered that question in a number of ways. ‘We want to know why John thinks you’re a bit special.’ ‘We’re young men - we’re looking for people like you who are a bit different.’ ‘We want a story to tell when we get home tonight.’ But somehow it feels like Jesus is asking us a bigger question than that. What are we looking for? Well, what ARE we looking for? What’s going to satisfy our young men’s dreams?*

*We stammer some kind of reply, a question about where he’s staying. I suppose if we’re honest we just want to find out more about him. He smiles and says, ‘Why not come and see.’*

*So here we are, spending most of the day with him, listening, asking ridiculous questions, watching how he does things, seeing how easily he talks with people. And I find myself more and more in awe of him. What he says makes so much sense. He seems to know exactly what he’s talking about, and has the authority to say it. He’s not arrogant though. He talks about God like he knows him personally. And he talks about us and the people in the villages as if he’s known us all his life. It’s astonishing.*

*It’s getting near four o’clock and suddenly I feel weary. I don’t know about John, but I feel sort of full up; I can’t hold any more. But I’m bursting to tell Simon about this man. Simon has never been the most tactful member of the family, but he’s a born leader and I love him. He speaks when others aren’t sure what to say; he acts when others hold back; he’s strong and brave, and honest as the day is long. I share everything with him, so now I simply have to share my discovery of Jesus.*

*I dig him out from behind the house, doing some chores. Maybe I’m a bit over the top, but I find myself saying, ‘Simon, we’ve found the messiah!’ The messiah is the person we believe will come as God’s anointed leader, the one who’ll win back our land and give us the justice and peace we long for. In a sense we Jews are always looking out for the messiah. So it’s a pretty big claim I’m making here. But Simon can see I’m serious, that something big has happened.*

*I’m tugging Simon along but to be honest he’s not resisting. We get down to Capernaum just as Jesus is about to have supper, but he gets up to greet us. He looks at Simon with those deep, searching eyes of his. Then he smiles. ‘So you’re Simon, are you?’ he says. ‘I think we’ll call you Cephas. Is that OK?’ That’s like saying he’s a stone or a rock or something. You can see Simon’s a bit puzzled, but chuffed as well. Like he’s saying Simon is strong and reliable, a leader. How does Jesus know?*

*We stay for a while, long enough for me to see that Simon is also getting hooked by that indefinable something that got hold of me earlier in the day. Jesus talks about a kingdom unlike anything we’ve ever known - but that somehow we’ve* ***always*** *known about as well. He tells stories; he makes jokes, he asks questions, he makes sense.*

*Simon and I leave Capernaum and wander back up the dark track to Bethsaida. We’re in a kind of excited bubble, remembering, swapping impressions. What are we going to do with all this? One thing I’m sure of - we’ll have to go and find Jesus again tomorrow. I don’t think Dad will mind us missing work for a bit.*

*But there’s part of me still turning over that first question Jesus asked John and me. ‘What are you looking for?’ So deceptively simple. So loaded. Or am I over-complicating things? ‘What AM I looking for?’*

It’s a fundamental question: what are you looking for? What is God calling us to be and to do? I usually answer this in three ways:

Firstly, there’s God’s call to us to be truly ourselves, the full-blown version, living life in abundance. The rabbis say the first question God will ask us in heaven is, ‘So, did you enjoy my creation?’ Did we make the most of this life; did we make the most of ourselves?

God’s second call to us is to be a Christian. As Justin Welby the Archbishop of Canterbury said, ‘The best decision that any human being can ever make in their life, anywhere in the world, in any circumstances, whoever they are, is to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord.’ I entirely agree.

And God’s third call is to be a Christian in a particular way, to find our gift or our contribution. Our second reading was from St Paul, saying, ‘There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service but the same Lord.’ And he gives lots of examples appropriate to that time. We might add – there’s a calling to be a listener, a volunteer in the community, a maker of hospitable cakes, a pray-er, a supporter of the Samaritans or Christian Aid, a churchwarden, even a vicar – and so on. The point is that we’re all called to contribute something particular, to put our energy into something specific for Christ.

The church isn’t a passenger liner where a few very hard-working crew members do all the work and the passengers drink cocktails. The church is a merchant ship where every person is a member of the crew. We just have to know what our task is as we sail towards the Kingdom.

Three callings then: first to be fully ourselves; second to be a Christian; and third to have a particular role as a follower of Christ – a call within the call.

As we answer those three callings so we find what we’re looking for – the freedom and joy of being who we’re meant to be.

Jesus’ question is still on the table: ‘What are you looking for?’