

Sunday 18th January. Epiphany 2. Benefice Holy Communion Ampleforth

A prayer for Christian Unity week:

Heavenly Father, you have called us in the Body of your Son Jesus Christ to continue his work of reconciliation and reveal you to the world: forgive us the sins which tear us apart; give us the courage to overcome our fears and to seek that unity which is your gift and your will; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?”

Today we commence the week of prayer for Christian unity and what a wonderful Gospel to set it off.

Here we are given the first statement that Jesus makes in John's gospel in verse 38, and it is a question. John the Baptist had just clearly and definitively pointed Jesus out to two of his disciples, saying, “*Look, here is the Lamb of God!*” These two disciples of John quickly made the decision to follow Jesus. When Jesus saw them following, he turned to them and asked: “*What are you looking for?*” When you think about it, there are a lot of things that Jesus might have said to them, just as there are lots of ways to greet people today. “Hello,” for example, or “How are you?”, “How's it going?” or maybe even something like, “Can I help you?”

But Jesus says to these two disciples rather mysteriously, “*What are you looking for?*” The Son of God looks at his first would-be followers and asks them to consider what it

is that they are really looking for. In much the same way as when he asks. ‘Who do you say I am?’ this is a question to stop and think about and is one of important questions that we can ever ask ourselves. What are you and I looking for? Do we ever stop and ask ourselves this question or do we rush through life, meeting the day’s needs, dealing with the thousand things this world throws at us, and rarely slow down enough to consider this question. When you come to church do you ask yourself the question before the service begins? If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, do you ask yourself what does that mean? Or do we sit in quiet self-righteous, complacency and think we have got everything sorted out and don’t really need to ask ourselves because we are there and have got the tea shirt! We might think we don’t need to answer the question because that might mean a change and perhaps, we really don’t want to change.

But maybe you do, maybe I do, maybe our church does here, our Benefice, our Deanery our Diocese, our denomination. Maybe we need to change how we worship, how we serve, what our church is for and what it is doing in our community and if we are doing these things for the right reasons, how God wants us to be. When Jesus first asked this question to those would-be followers, he wanted to make sure that they were following him for the right reasons. Were they looking for a military commander who would lead them out of the oppression they were experiencing from Rome? Were they looking for a teacher of the Scriptures who would help them understand exactly what they had to do to earn righteousness in God’s eyes? Were they looking for a miracle-worker who would heal

them of their sickness? Jesus did not come to bring these things. He came to bring salvation.

It was John the Baptist who knew and understood what Jesus came to bring us. When he saw Jesus, he said: "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" If this is what those disciples were looking for, then they have found it in Jesus. If they are looking for anything else, then they will only end up disappointed, as will you or me too, if we don't take to heart those words and live out what they mean in service.

So, the questions today as we begin to pray for Christian Unity for you and me, for our church, for our community is 'What are you looking for? What are we really hoping to get out of life? What gets us out of bed in the morning? What keeps us awake at night? When it comes right down to it, what are we really looking for and, more specifically, what are we hoping to find in Jesus? If we are looking for anything other than the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, then Jesus will only be another in a long line of disappointments. On the other hand, if this is exactly what we are looking for, then the very next words that Jesus speaks in John's Gospel offer a wonderful invitation to us all: "*Come and see.*"

That is His invitation as we go into this week to and join Jesus for the great adventure of the Christian life with each other in this week praying for unity. If that is what you are looking for, following Jesus begins us on a journey, a journey of having our eyes opened to the grace and mercy and love that is always right there, right here, right in front of us, in plain sight. Jesus invites us to, 'Come and see.'

Thanks be to God. Amen.

