

All Saints Talk for 18 February 2024

Naomi Pendle

God's Questions: What do you want?

John 1:29-42. The disciples follow Jesus

John Testifies About Jesus

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."^[a]

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

So today we move on to the New Testament, we've been thinking about God's questions. We started right back in Genesis, when they were hiding in the garden and God asked where they were, we've moved through the Old Testament, we had a Job a couple of weeks ago with Emma and last week, we're thinking about those dry bones, will those bones live. But this week it's a big step forward, because as we kind of come into lent, and we think about Easter ahead, we are moving into the New Testament, and we're thinking about the questions of Jesus Himself.

And often we think about Jesus being the answer, you know, you get those kind of bumper stickers, I always think of them as probably, you know, in America on the big SUVs of 'Jesus is the answer'. And probably many of us have a sense in which Jesus has been the answer at difficult times in our life. And we can testify about how he's provided, and he's helped us through. But actually, in many ways, Jesus isn't the answerer. He's the questioner. If you look through the New Testament, and scholars have done this, they've tried to count how many questions Jesus asks. And it's at least three hundred, you know, he is asking questions of people all the time.

Even if you think right back to when he was a little boy, you know, the first time we kind of hear Jesus as someone who can speak, you know, beyond when he's a baby, and he goes with his parents to the temple. His parents leave him behind by mistake, and they have to return to the temple to look for him. And where do they find him? They find him, with the teachers listening to them and asking them questions. The first word or thoughts we hear of what Jesus is doing is asking questions, and we see that kind of continue through the New Testament, right until his death.

But then, what about the answers? We see very, very kind of few direct answers, and maybe three, maybe eight people who have tried to kind of count what counts as a direct answer. But really, Jesus is hesitant to give these direct answers. Instead, he questions he draws people in through questioning. And these are some of the questions he asked -what is written in the law? How do you read it? Who is your neighbour? Why are you so afraid? Who do you say I am? What do you want me to do for you? Who touched me? Are you asleep? Could you not wait one hour? Do you love me? Oh my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And what are you discussing? And that's where

we'll end our sermon series later, after Easter. What are you discussing from the Emmaus road?

So today, we are looking at this question from John 1. What do you want? And what I'll talk about today, I'll talk about this question. What do you want? What at that moment was John the Baptist and his disciples. So we hear about in this passage two disciples, they were probably John, who is the author of the gospel, although he's not named, and Andrew. And they were with John the Baptist. So we've got a couple of John's to deal with - John the Baptist, John who probably authored that gospel and Andrew. So we're thinking, first of all, what did they want in that moment? Then we'll think about will you come and see Jesus' response to those disciples was to come to invite them to come. So I will ask, will you come and see, will you abide with Jesus? And then the third question, is Jesus worth following? So we will work through those points now.

So what do you want? What did they want? What were they waiting for? So we join in this story we join John the Baptist as he is preaching and as he is baptising in the Jordan River, and he is getting a crowd. And so he is getting the attention of the religious authorities in Jerusalem. They are wondering why this guy in the wilderness is getting such a following. And he's getting a following, including from John and Andrew, who will go on to be Jesus's first disciples. And so the Levites are sent out to say to John the Baptist, who are you? What's going on? What what is your message in all of this? And he's very clear from the beginning that he is just there to prepare the way that he is not the Messiah. But he is the voice of one in the wilderness that is making straight the way for the Lord. He is the one preparing the way and therefore he is waiting. What does he want? He wants the Messiah to come. He wants to prepare the way for the Messiah and he wants people to turn from their sins in preparation for His coming.

And he's quoting Isaiah 40, in that, when he says I'm the one calling in the wilderness. And Isaiah 40, if you go back to it is full of big images of gods. It's full of the idea that God will come and he will straighten the ways and he will clear the paths. For example, in verse four and five, it reads, every valley shall be raised up, and every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level, the rugged place a plane and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all the people will see it together. It's a big prophecy for the

future. And John is waiting for that, and his disciples are waiting for that. And in many ways, it was part of a turn in kind of the people of God to be expecting the Messiah. Now, hundreds of years, four years before or more, they've been kicked out of Jerusalem, they've been kicked away from the temple, the temple had been destroyed then and it would be destroyed again. There were generations of the people of God who hadn't been able to visit the temple, and not the temple as it had been in its former glory. And in that lack of temple people had returned to the Scriptures. And in returning to the Scripture said, read things like Isaiah, and they were waiting for a Messiah, they were waiting for someone to come and save them, to straighten the path, to straighten the hills, and to see His glory. His glory not confined in the temple, but for the whole of Jerusalem. And especially at that time, with the Romans occupying the land, people would have been eager to see something different. So they are waiting for a big Messiah figure.

But in this, we see Jesus coming and John, seeing Jesus and saying, No he is the Messiah, He is the Lamb of God. Now, obviously, as we know, with John, he would have already known Jesus, they were cousins, their births came together, they would have heard stories growing up of how their mothers had prophesied, and had spoken and had rejoiced in similar moments. They would have known each other as people. But we hear really in this passage from John, that it was through John seeing the dove coming upon Jesus and seeing God declaring him as a son of God that he realised fully who he was, that he was the Messiah, he was the one that had been waiting for. He had seen and so then he declared to Andrew, and to John, this is the one, this is the one I've been waiting for. Go, go follow him and see what you can kind of find out. So you have this image of John the Baptist, with his disciples, seeing Jesus knowing he's the son of God, having had that declared to him. And then John the Baptist, instructing his disciples to follow Jesus.

So Jesus is moving away, these two disciples, Andrew and John are following him. And then you get this moment where Jesus turns around and says, what do you want? And in many ways, you think, well what, what do they want. They want him to say, I am the Messiah, they want him to show His glory, they want him to take back control of Jerusalem. There's many, many things they would have wanted in that moment. He was the Son of God, God had said he

was the Son of God, he was the Lamb of God. They wanted that. But in that moment, they didn't say that. Whether that was a mistake, or kind of a beautiful moment of wisdom who knows? But they said, where are you staying? Very practically, where are you staying? We want to come and stay with you. Where are you staying? Even that question, Jesus doesn't answer directly. Even when they say, where are you staying? I think he could have said, oh, by the barn, you just kind of go up the hill and turn left. But he doesn't. He gives an instruction. Instead, he says, Come and see, come with me, come and see. And so they follow Him. They go with him. He doesn't give the answer in all in one moment. He takes them with him. They are his followers.

And I find it quite interesting that when we think about discipleship and following Jesus, we often think of does that come before you commit to Jesus? Does it come afterwards? Are you always a disciple once you believe? But actually, in that moment, those two disciples, Andrew and John, they were investigating, they didn't have all the answers. They were right at the beginning of their journey. And still they followed him. Jesus says, come that you have loads of questions. I'm not just going to lay out the answers for you. I'm going to take you with me come with me. He called them to be followers. And what followers means I think our society has obviously kind of torn apart what that means to be a follower. I don't know how many people here use Instagram or Facebook. But followers, you follow people from a distance and you click on a button and you see their news about their lives. That was not the kind of following that Jesus was talking about that he was inviting Andrew and John into, he was inviting them to be part of his life, to walk alongside them. He had the image of discipleship that John the Baptist also had. Of people, being with him living with him staying with him. He had the image of discipleship that much of that the kind of ancient world has. That you were not just a disciple to attend a few lessons a week to listen to a sermon but you would walk together. It wasn't that life could be compartmentalised. There was church on a Sunday, and then other things midweek and, and private life at home, which was separate from life in the church. These things weren't in different places. For the teachers of the day, as for the Rabbis of the day people would follow them, and would be part of all of their life. And that's what Jesus was inviting them into. A process, a way of living with them, of abiding with them.

But I also think it's really interesting that this road clearly wasn't a straight path for them, they would walk together and they would walk with Jesus, and it would be a process. But it wasn't always going to be kind of a clear one, always in the right direction. Sometimes they would walk around in circles. What really strikes me when you read this passage in John, is you open the Gospel of John, John one, and I'm sure you're very familiar with the declaration of Jesus being the word that he was there in the beginning, that he was part of creation and the creator figure. And then John the Baptist is seeing Him as the Messiah. He's saying very clearly, this is the Messiah that we've been waiting for. I'm preparing the way for him go and follow Him. Lots of the other gospels don't have it quite so clear from the beginning.

So John is very confident right from those first verses in the first chapter that this is the Messiah. Many of the other gospels tell a story of the disciples trying to work it out as they go along, having doubts, not really knowing, and slowly coming to a revelation of who Jesus is. So sometimes, that can almost create a tension of what is John right that they knew from the beginning, or the other gospels right, that it took them a long time to slowly work it out. I would say they're not contradictory. Because most of us go through life with a bit of both. We'll have moments where we feel really confident in our faith, and we feel like we know who Jesus is. But then we have other moments of doubts or moments of questions that we don't feel we get the right answers to quick enough. And so it's often a process of then listening and returning and dwelling with God again to hear him again. You know, the disciples had to face questions from the Levites, from the priests from other people saying is Jesus really who you think he is? And so often our lives don't go on a kind of simple straight path or a simple uphill kind of trajectory. But we walk around, but it's a process that Jesus walks with us that all the time even when we question, he says, come and be with me, I might not give you the answers you want, I might not give you a straight answer. But if you come and dwell, then you will understand.

And I think I was really reminded of this idea of abiding that comes out in John again in other places. In John 15, we hear about Jesus saying to His disciples, remain in me as I remain in you, and abide in me. This sense that, Jesus doesn't answer our questions, but he calls us to abide with him. Abide with him, like

the branches of a vine, abide in the vine, and then they bear fruit. And he calls us to abide. And we do that many of you do that so well. We're thinking about the 24 hours of prayer, that sense which people came to abide in him for a while, and that call to do that again and again. And Ben reminded me earlier of the power of praying every morning, that just to kind of declare the day is God's and to remember to abide in him. I remember staying with a missionary family all day they would pray. It shocked me and it sounds silly of course, we're called to pray all the time. But even when they were going to buy groceries, they would pray and say God, I want to be with you want opportunities as I go to the shops or to the market. And that that sense of always abiding in Him and through that learning, learning the answers to the questions we have. Not through those explicit answers, but through seeing Jesus in our lives, and seeing Jesus in the things he did.

And of course, that's what these disciples went on to do. So soon they are John and Andrew, we know that John lived his life out and he wrote, and he recorded Jesus's story and he saw his life. And he and he helped build the early church. And Andrew as well, went on to live alongside Jesus, to remain faithful to Him after His death and resurrection and eventually to be martyred. That actually even though Jesus didn't say all the answers at once, by dwelling with him and living with him, they could see him. They could see the glory of Jesus, they could see the glory of the prophecy in Isaiah. And they came to know him and be his followers and see him in all his glory.

I'll end with this last kind of point, which is so clear in this passage, this question is Jesus worth following. The disciples saw it, they gave everything. They made sacrifices in those initial days to leave their boats, they have capital, they weren't poor, they had boats, like at that time, and they could fish and they weren't necessarily unwealthy. They gave up in that moment. But over time, they gave their whole lives to following Jesus, they saw by dwelling with him that he was worthy.

But we get this image right from the beginning in John one of Jesus being the lamb of God. And it's such a striking image, because it's not necessarily the image we get from Isaiah 40. Isaiah 40 tells us of a much kind of bigger god of a glorious god. Of a god, he's going to conquer, who's going to come back and flatten the earth, and make things easy and show himself in all his glory. In

Isaiah 40, we also get the image of a shepherd, that the Messiah will come back and shepherd his people, that the shepherd is the leader of the flock. And here John is saying, Jesus is the Lamb of God, but the Messiah that you've been waiting for he might be all those things, the glory and the shepherd and the king. He might be the horn of salvation, which we hear about in a kind of prophecy over John the Baptist, when it says he's going to make the way clear for the Messiah. But John's first kind of declaration of the messiah isn't any of those things. It is that Jesus is the lamb of God, who will take away the sins of the world. That he is a kind of much more humble figure. He is part of the flock and not just the shepherds.

John the Baptist, who said those words was the son of a priest who went and served in the temple, he would have known full well what the lamb meant. On a regular basis, his father would have been part of the ceremonies of the sacrificing of the lamb. And people would have known that that's who John was, that he was the son of a priest that he knew what it meant to be in the temple. He knew what it meant for a lamb to be killed, and the lamb was killed to take away sins. That we get stuff wrong and that builds up and tears our relationship apart with God. We can't abide with him because we are so broken and we've fallen so far short. To abide with God, you know, right in the beginning of Eden, as we heard Adam and Eve abided with God, but that was torn away. And God had allowed the lamb to be sacrificed so that sins can be forgiven, so that we could be in relationship with God. And now the Messiah was to be the ultimate lamb. He was to be sacrificed as we know to die, to bring us back so we could abide with God again. And in many ways, it makes Jesus very meek and humble. But actually, in many ways, this is also a much bigger message than him being king, or him being a mighty warrior, or him just being the shepherd. Because in him coming, the Messiah coming as a lamb he overturns everything. No longer is our relationship pulled apart from God. But God shows he's asked us to come and see and he shows us that he will die for us. That even his son will die for us, and that we can return to abiding with him.