

Isaiah 40:21-31
Psalm 147
Mark 1:29-39

Searching

The news the disciples bring to Jesus: “Everyone is searching for you”. In the immediate context of the drama, this is the result of the impressive impact Jesus’ ministry is having on those around him. They want more: Everyone is searching for *you*.

The gospel as a whole, however, makes a greater claim for this declaration. The “everyone” who seeks Jesus is not just those in the story but those who *read* the story – and indeed even those who don’t. This Jesus, the gospel declares, is the one *you* are searching for. The church’s faith is that Jesus is the answer to a question we all ask, the missing thing we seek. We are all on a quest for something, and that something is Jesus.

This is rather a big claim. Between us, we search for a thousand different things in a thousand different ways: the job you want, the book you’re reading, the endless scrolling through TikTok, the lover you hope to find, the chocolate you crave, the country you invade, the country you defend, the holiday you desperately need – these are, in the end, all searches for something, for some one thing. The gospel proposes that Jesus is the secret hidden in any specific thing we seek.

This is scarcely believable, of course. Jesus is surely a “religious” thing, and most of what we do most of the time has little to do with what we call religion. And yet, the concern of the gospel is not one part of us but the whole of us. We are not made up of many parts, and also a religious part; we are a unified whole. The gospel’s concern is either everything – what we call “religious” and not – or it is nothing.

Yet, even if we grant this, to say that Jesus is what we seek remains deeply problematic because the implication seems to be that there are some – Christians in particular – who have found what everyone is looking for, and there are many – everyone else – who haven’t. There is here the possibility of a deep arrogance, and indeed a possibility which has been realised in much violence through the ages: you infidels must become what we are and believe as we believe, if you are to be whole. And we might have to kill you if you don’t.

The claim that Jesus is what we all seek, then, is eminently corruptible and can become deeply inhuman. But this doesn’t falsify the gospel’s own nuanced version of the claim. The full sweep of the gospel story reveals that those around Jesus, though they have “found” him, continue to be quite lost about what they have found. At this early point in the narrative, they are the enthusiastic followers of Jesus, who is the latest pursuit-worthy thing and perhaps even the *final* thing, the one thing needful. And they watch as others find in Jesus the answer to some quest – “Everyone is *looking for you*”. But as the story continues, Jesus’ circle of friends discover more about him, such that the more they know, the *less* found he becomes. “Who do you say that I am”, Jesus will ask half-way through the gospel story, and the confused answer of “Simon and his companions” is that they don’t really know. They have sought him, and found him, but he is not what they thought they were seeking.

And so, seeking Jesus is not like seeking a lost coin or sheep. He is not the answer to a question which might be found and popped into its proper place. To find in Jesus what we most earnestly seek is rather more like looking in a mirror and not recognising myself because this special mirror shows me what I've never seen before. What I have never seen before is what I will be, and not what I still am, which I usually see in the mirror. This strange image is both me and not *yet* me. For it is, finally, a reconciliation to ourselves that we seek, a recognition of ourselves: yes, that's me, finally. But, strangely, I don't yet know what I look like – what I *should* look like. This is, then, a strange seeking. We both know and don't know what we seek, which make the process endless. What can make this restless search bearable?

“Everyone is searching for you”, announce the disciples. But Jesus responds, “Let us go to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do”. Our looking for Jesus is met with his seeking us out. It is as if, though we seek Jesus, in the end it is he who finds us. This is to say that our finding ourselves is not limited by our knowing where to look or our capacities to understand. While we search, God actively seeks us.

This means that what we do and what is done to us are the forms in which God will find us, and we will find God. Though our searching might cause us to leave home, or to steal something, or to turn vegan, faith expects from any such thing that *God* will meet us there. The gospel's promise is that God longs to find us more than we long to find God, and that God's finding of us is how we will find ourselves.

We seek Jesus because he is the point at which the many things a person does are found in the one divine heart. This is what I came out to do, Jesus says: to be the one who finds God in all I do. “This is what I came out to do”, Jesus says: I came to reveal all those who seek wholeness, completeness, and reconciliation as found in God.

Our lives – all that we do – are a journey to God. To believe this is to open ourselves to the possibility that in every act, every encounter, and every word, we might meet God and become a bit more ourselves.

Would not such a life be worth living, in which everything we did, enjoyed, and suffered was part of the whole of God, and the means by which we continue our journey into that completeness?

“Everyone is searching for you”, the disciples tell you. “I know”, he responds, and I have come that I might be found, and you might be found too.
