

Seeking God

Isaiah 55:1-9; Luke 13:1-9

In 1987 the Irish rock band U2 released an album, the Joshua Tree, and one of the hit singles from it was called, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for." Just about every preacher during that year, and 1987 was the year I was ordained, used the theme of the song in their sermons. "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" shows gospel music influences and is a song about spiritual yearning.

I believe in the Kingdom Come

Then all the colours will bleed into one...

But yes, I'm still runnin'

You broke the bonds and you loosened the chains

Carried the cross of my shame...

You know I believe it

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for...

We live in a world bombarded by information. Where once we had to go to libraries and pore over weighty tomes now many of us through computers and iPhones and other forms of technology have the wisdom, or rather, the information, of ages tucked away in our pockets or sitting on desks and tables at home. On my new laptop there is an Artificial Intelligence button, and I typed in, "Seeking God" and it came up with some ideas for a sermon. Not nearly as good as the original wording you're getting from me, you understand, but nevertheless for some people a place to start,

Many people spend large parts of their lives seeking for something. The perfect golf swing. The perfect pitch in their singing or in playing a musical instrument. The perfect balance of seasoning in a recipe. The perfect book that entertains and educates. The perfect pillow that helps you sleep

better. The perfect love, that person whose response to us and care of us and kindness towards us and consideration of us and joy in us makes life wonderful.

We seek and seek and seek. Sometimes we find, and sometimes we do not. This impulse to go on seeking and searching seems to be inbuilt. Looking, wondering, learning, moving. Seeking is a dynamic process: it involves the movement of the mind, and the body. It involves the movement of understanding and very often coming to terms with a change our seeking expects.

I have often admired the great historic adventurers launching out into voyages of discovery. Christopher Columbus saying, "Following the light of the sun, we left the Old World." In search of new continents and new worlds.

In his journey to and fro along the silk road to India, China and back again, the Italian land adventurer Marco Polo said: "I have not told half of what I saw."

Neil Armstrong's famous saying when landing on the moon, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Or even Elon Musk, "I would like to die on Mars. Just not on impact."

There's a thought.

In these quotations you have in a nutshell the eternal desire of humanity's searching, this propulsion that takes us forward. Not without risk; not without failure; but looking, wondering, asking, seeking.

What are *you* seeking? What are *you* looking for in life, in relationships, in work, in love? What are the criteria by which you choose and make decisions? Or is it the case that for you, you still haven't found what you're looking for? Does that make you anxious, or depressed, or motivated, or excited? Are you primed to move forward? Are you deflated and given up?

Are you seeking God? Have you ever asked in a situation, in your life, 'Where is God in all of this?'

In the times of disaster and accomplishment? In the times when it has all gone terribly wrong, or

wonderfully right. I believe human beings are designed not to be totally complacent, but to be broadly enquiring. From the moment of birth we are looking and learning, we are listening and understanding, we are seeking and asking. In the Isaiah reading from the Old Testament the prophet called the children of Israel to, 'Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.'

What was it you were looking for that led you here to Church this morning? The stirring of the soul that music brings. The joy of seeing some young people involved in different ways in the service or singing as scholars in the choir. The reading of traditional Bible passages, and the familiar words of hymns. A sense of order from the service; a sense of comfort from prayers that might help put into consciousness what you are feeling but you haven't quite found the words. A sermon that opens your mind, or challenges your preconceptions, and things with which to agree, and just as important, to disagree.

"Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."

The act of seeking is highlighted throughout the Bible. People seeking God desire some kind of deeper relationship with God; striving to understand what God wants, wanting to align their lives with what God seeks for the world. What God seeks for the world from us is that we, "...do justice...love kindness, and walk humbly with your God..."ⁱ God is not just about the rituals of religion but about cultivating an open heart and mind, ready to experience God's presence in our everyday lives.

Seeking God is a dynamic process, one that allows us to grow in understanding and love, transforming our lives as we draw nearer to Him each day. As we seek, we find not only solace and strength but also the grace to become more like the image of God in which we are created.

In our modern world, even on Sunday, even in Lent, people crave satisfaction. Maybe we realise at some point in the service that we seek God's face. But we understand that seeing God's face will not be easy. Will God be happy with us, or sad? Will God be pleased with what we are doing, or disappointed? Will God remember us, and our names? Will God care about what we are living through, and offer help?

In seeking God we must be prepared for those times when we meet Him, or we become aware that God has discovered us. If we want to be the best Christians that we can be, or attempt to be, it is our challenge to stay close to the source of our faith, Jesus, and to return to Him when we have strayed. To bear fruit and not be like the barren fig trees not fulfilling their function.

God is still near! God still provides for us! God will still forgive us. God still will place trust in us! God still loves us!

When the prophet Isaiah was recording what he felt God was saying through him to the exiled and enslaved children of Israel in Babylon, he knew that he, and they, felt about as far away from God as they could be. Their homes were so distant and probably destroyed. Their towns and cities were broken and reduced to rubble. Their Temple, where they thought God had lived, was lying in ruins, razed to the ground.

Yet there, in their distant, frightening physical, emotional and spiritual exile, they heard God's voice. 'Ho!' God said. Are you thirsty, are you hungry, are you poor? Come to me, I have found you, I'm still here, I am with you. In the place they would rather not be, in a situation they would rather not endure, at a time they thought would never end, whether or not they had been seeking God, God had come to find them. And did.

It may be here in Church this morning, or with those of you watching online, you find yourselves in your lives at home, at work, or right there in your heads and your hearts, in places where you

would rather not be, in situations that you would rather not endure, in a time that you think will never end. Physical pain. Emotional stress. Numbing uncertainty. Blood-boiling frustration. Personal danger. Work overload. At home and in a personal relationship; at work with colleagues; with your own health or the health of someone else. Maybe it is bereavement that has made you feel distanced and lost. Maybe it's the ongoing horror of the daily news and when will the suffering ever end. Maybe it is the endless grind of making ends meet, because there are no more financial corners to cut.

'Ho!' says God. 'Here I am!' says God. 'Over here!' says God. In the Church, on a hilltop, in a wood, by the sea. Somewhere this waving God, the God we are supposed to be seeking, has come to find us knowing that we were still too far off.

He's found you now. He's got you. He's going to help you, maybe with others. Our seeking God, no longer waiting for us to discover Him, but coming to us, to find us, and take us home.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Micah 6:8