

St Bartholomew's Burnley 18th January 2026

"Come and See"

"Today's Gospel gives us Jesus' first spoken words in the Gospel of John. And they are perplexing words, words that require an answer: "What are you looking for he asks them."

Another, better translation: "What are you seeking?" Both an invitation and an examination. Jesus' first words in the Gospel of John are a question—an important question "what are you seeking?" It's an invitation to actively examine our own hearts and to see, to bear witness to, what we find there.

The two disciples he asks don't actually answer the question, do they? In fine rabbinic tradition, they respond with still another question. "Where are you staying?" Which is actually another poor translation, because it reads a little as if these two disciples of John are asking where Jesus' hotel room is or bed and breakfast in today talk.

What they're actually asking is a bit more significant; it's the same verb that Jesus himself will use later, when he says "I abide in you, as you abide in me." The disciples are asking, "Where do you abide? Where do you make your home? Where do you rest? Where may we come and be present with you?" And Jesus does not give them the easy answer. He doesn't say, "Nazareth" or "next door to Bob." He merely says, "Come and see."

It is an invitation, this "Come and see." It is similar to the invitation that the church and individuals Christians ask of others. It is also a challenge. If we are to come and see something, we have to be open to the possibility that it is going to be something new.

One of the most challenging and demanding issue for the times is to ask the questions 'What is morally appropriate human behaviour and conduct for the twenty-first century and what

does it mean to be human'? How are we called by God to live our lives?

The questions are asked in the context of declining engagement and belief in the tenets of the Christian faith recognized and noted with concern by both religious and non-religious writers and commentators. I am writing this from a first world perspective living in a country of wealth where there are issues that divide and discriminate community life that reflects growing disadvantage and lack of visionary leadership at many levels.

What seems significant issues for Australians however are in many ways insignificant in comparison with third world populations that struggle to feed their families and survive. The belief that Christ through his life, death and resurrection has given a new meaning to human existence once broadly accepted has now been in many places abandoned. The broad Judaic -Christian ethic of a common humanity that has influenced our laws and society in Australia and other parts of the Western world has been increasingly undermined by neo liberalism, an economic agenda demanding small government, control to the market, and manipulative and dishonest political, corporate and dare I say religious leaders of various faiths as the guiding paradigm for life. This has resulted in a growing disparity between the rich and poor, the haves and have nots. It has been reported by Oxfam and others that the worlds resources are under the control of a few and they would be no more than fill a bus.

At the same time the place and role of religion in contemporary society has been slowly undermined by a range of interest

groups and the inability and failure of many of the traditional churches to recognise the changes taking place with at times an increasingly unwillingness to enter conversations, listen and to accept the developments in science, education, technology, and medicine. At the same time more assertive, prosperity evangelical Gospel churches have embraced the neo liberal values of economics assuring their converts that all will be well if they believe. This I firmly believe is a corruption of the Christian message to love one's neighbour as God loves us. The Christian mission is to serve the other not ourselves or the institution of the church. This is precisely the offer Jesus is making to those who seek to follow him. Not where are your hotel room or bed and breakfast but follow my lifestyle my commitment to justice, to inclusion, to compassion for others It is not about self but community and social cohesion, something we desperately need now. E.g. Bondi and new legislation re free speech

The other issue that has affected adherence to faith is the violence that has been done in the name of God. As Jonathan Sacks says in his book, "Not in God's Name," when religion turns people into murderers God weeps. As we can recall from history people have plundered, murdered, kidnapped, colonized in the name of God and we still do. Examples include Apartheid in South Africa, the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, the massacre of Indigenous people here in Australia, the ongoing violence in Ukraine, Israel, and Gaza. The current politicizing of

proposed legislation against free speech following the Bondi massacre, another example of our failure to work together and instead go tribal.

In his book Sacks asks the question, "Does not our overarching humanity transcend our religious differences?" He goes on to discuss whether we are religious or not and asks are we not all created in the image of God? Are we therefore no more than selfish genes, in an increasing secular and humanist society where we seem to be no different from animals and where money and success have become the agenda for our times in a world that has no other purpose than to pleasure one's self. In today's Gospel Jesus poses an alternative "Come and see"

How are we today to "come and see". How do we restore broken relationships between faiths, families and nations? What should be the first step?

1. We need to begin to acknowledge that the world has changed since the so-called age of Christendom in the areas of marriage, family, community, a shared moral code, community and self interest
2. Past moral criteria have disadvantaged and excluded people, e.g. one's lot in society.
3. Moral codes attributed to scripture and God is often doctrine created by Church leaders. This is not to say that they understood fully the content of scripture.

4. Let's begin to talk and listen to one another in a spirit of love rather than on of sibling rivalry. While Christians claim the uniqueness of Jesus is there not more than there being only one way of being under the sovereignty of God?
5. Within humanity is not one's privileged position implying another's defeat or relegation. We fight over the same resources; we seek ownership rather than shared resources.
6. Violence exists because we are social animals and seek to find our identity in groups.

Come and see is a message of hope, of resilience, of freedom and trust that God calls his church to proclaim and to live in its own life. A life of inclusion, joy, prayer, worship and service. A common humanity for us all.

May this be our ongoing calling to the world.