

Can you just think back to a time when you played hide and seek with a child, particularly a very young one? There is the thrill of hiding but also of being sought after. There is the toe left poking out from behind the settee, the barely suppressed giggle from behind the curtain – and the thrill of being found. When they are looking for us, we need to strike that balance between making it too easy for them to find us (denying them the excitement of the hunt) and being out of sight for too long. And here again there is the delight of finding.

I just want to ponder on this whole business of seeking and being sought after, finding and being found, in the context of our Gospel and Psalm for this morning.

Looking first at our reading from John's Gospel; Jesus goes to Galilee and finds Philip and calls him to follow. Philip, having been found by Jesus, then tells others of finding Jesus. In this passage the Gospel writer gives us this sense of Philip both finding Jesus and being found by Jesus,

This sense of finding and being found, seeking out and being sought, is a theme running through the Psalm appointed for today, Psalm 139. For the Psalmist, the God who seeks, the God who finds, is a God who already knows him intimately, from the very moment of conception and formation in the womb, his thoughts, his fears, his regrets; a God who still loves him and seeks him unrelentingly. In a section not included in the portion we have used today, he talks of the length and breadth of that search. The Psalmist in his feelings of worthlessness may seek to avoid God but God will never abandon him in his lostness.

- 6 Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦
Or where can I flee from your presence?
- 7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; ♦
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

- 8 If I take the wings of the morning ♦
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 9 Even there your hand shall lead me, ♦
your right hand hold me fast.
- 10 If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will cover me ♦
and the light around me turn to night,’
- 11 Even darkness is no darkness with you;
the night is as clear as the day; ♦
darkness and light to you are both alike.

There is something akin here to the unrelenting search of the Hound of Heaven
in Francis Thompson’s poem

I fled Him down the nights and down the days
I fled Him down the arches of the years
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind, and in the midst of tears
I hid from him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped and shot precipitated
Adown titanic glooms of chasmed fears
From those strong feet that followed, followed after
But with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat, and a Voice beat,
More instant than the feet:
All things betray thee who betrayest me.

.....

Now of that long pursuit,
Comes at hand the bruit.
That Voice is round me like a bursting Sea:
And is thy Earth so marred,
Shattered in shard on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest me.

.....

Rise, clasp my hand, and come.
Halts by me that Footfall.
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
Ah, Fondest, Blindest, Weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest.
Thou dravest Love from thee who dravest Me.

Francis Thomson – Hound of heaven

The God who seeks and finds me, knows me and loves me not because of anything I do but simply because of who I am before him. There is that often hackneyed text; ‘God so loved the world’ That is the world, the world as it is, good and bad, the nobility and the fragility of human nature.

Going back to our Gospel reading; Philip, having found and been found by Jesus, goes off and seeks his friend Nathaniel and says, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ (*John 1:45*) To Nathaniel’s rather truculent reply, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip simply says, ‘Come and see.’ Come and find out for yourself. Come and find and be found, come and seek and know that you are sought. Come and see.

Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury when I was growing up, once said that the practice of infant baptism, before the child can make any response of her own, reminds us that my Christian faith, my Christian life begins not in anything that I have done but in what Christ has already done for me in Christ. I am sought long before I seek; I am found long before I find. My discipleship, just like that of Philip and Nathaniel begins not with anything that I can do, I can offer. It begins with the simple realisation that I am a child of God, beloved in all my strengths and my failings, my sin and my obedience; that God sought me and found me and made me his own.

My discipleship, my own Christian witness is simply a response to that love that has sought and found me; that our lives, our words and our deeds, in all that we say or think or do, may be living invitations to others to come and see, come and find, come and be found by him who has known us from the very beginning of the world, Jesus Christ our Lord.