

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.

As I read over our Psalm with its words of intimate knowledge, the knowledge a lover has of the beloved, the words of a pop song from years ago came to my mind:

You know me better than I know myself
You know me the best
You know me better than I know myself
You know what to expect.

And the reply comes back:

Understand it
Nobody understands you
The way that I can
Let's see this thing through
One thing remaining
Things will never be the same again

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.

To go back to that song

You know me better than I know myself
You know me the best
You know me better than I know myself
You know what to expect.

God knows me and loves me. He really does know me better than I know myself. As I say over and over again, in the person of Jesus God knows, really knows what it is to be me. He knows my strengths and my weaknesses, my virtues and my failings. There is a great truth to that adage; ‘There is nothing that I can do that will make God love me more and there is nothing that I have done that will make God love me less. He still seeks us out and calls us into his service.

Understand it
Nobody understands you
The way that I can
Let's see this thing through
One thing remaining
Things will never be the same again

My discipleship, my own Christian witness is simply a response to that love that has sought me and found me. And he invites us: Let's see this thing through, don't be discouraged – I am with you always, to the very end of time – and he assures us: Things will never be the same again.

May our lives, our words and our deeds, in all that we say or think or do, be living invitations to others to come and see; to come and find; to come and be found by him who has known us from the very beginning of the world, Jesus Christ our Lord.