

*Sermon preached by Rev. David Pettett at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 26 October, 2005. Reading: John 1:35-41
Topic: "Who Are You Looking For?"*

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

John 18:1-8

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go."

John 20:11-18

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"--and that he had said these things to her.

Who are you looking for?

- * *Following the Lamb of God*
- * *Finding Jesus of Nazareth*
- * *Clinging to the risen Jesus*

The expression, "Who (what) are you looking for", occurs three times in John's Gospel. Each time is a significant occasion of revelation and discovery of who Jesus is and what our response to him should be.

The first occasion is John 1:38. Right at the beginning of the Gospel, as John the Baptist is preparing the way for Jesus, Jesus passes by and John declares to his own disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God." With that, two of John's disciples leave him to follow Jesus. But they begin to follow hesitantly, at a distance. This sort of "following" is not an option and Jesus turns and challenges them. "What are you seeking?" he says. These two seem a little taken aback that they have been pulled up from a discreet distance in the background to face the scrutiny of Jesus. They don't actually answer the question but respond with a question of their own, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Having been caught off guard the two disciples suggest to Jesus they want to find out a little more about him by spending some time with him. It was good timing for they were able to spend the day with Jesus and no doubt they listened to him late into the night. They were changed men after this encounter. One of them, Andrew, went and found his brother Simon and said to Simon, "We have found the Messiah!" - A profound and very bold statement. Having been challenged by Jesus not to stay in the background and having listened to his teaching these disciples have come to understand that this man is the Messiah.

For the second time that John uses the words, "who are you looking for?" we turn almost to the end of the Gospel - 18:4. This is in the garden of Gethsemane and Judas is putting into action his plan to betray Jesus. Judas has gathered troops and religious officials who come

under the cover of night with weapons and torches to arrest Jesus. Surprisingly it is Jesus who takes the initiative as the band enters the quiet place he often used as a retreat with his disciples. "Whom are you seeking?" he challenges them. "Jesus of Nazareth," they boldly proclaim. "I am he." ... There is a pause. Our eyes turn to see Judas standing with them. But as we wonder what will happen next our thoughts are brought straight back to the situation before us in the garden with a great clatter of noise as, comically, the troops draw back from Jesus and fall over themselves to the ground. Jesus asks them again, "Whom do you seek?" They repeat the name, "Jesus of Nazareth." Unwittingly, these soldiers who have come to do him harm have announced that they are looking for the historical Jesus. They have come looking not for a mystic, not for a man of visions and dreams. This Jesus, who knew all that was about to happen to him is a real man whose place is clearly marked in history. He is Jesus of Nazareth. God has not left us alone to wonder what He is like. He does not tease us with fleeting glimpses whereby we invent strange ceremonies, chanting and clothing so that we might feel closer to him. Our God has come to us in the darkness and made himself known as Jesus of Nazareth. Judas has come to apparently force Jesus' hand; to force him to stand up to the crease and finally, as a type of warrior messiah, militarily take a stand for the Kingdom of God. The soldiers have come to find an insurgent and take him to ingratiate their sadistic desires. The religious officials have come to get rid of a regional upstart who has been threatening their powerbase. None of them find what they're looking for, for although they have the right man, Jesus of Nazareth, they have failed to understand that this historical figure is the Lamb of God (John 1:36), the Bread of life (John 6:35), the Light of the World (John 9:5), the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11), and that he is the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25).

The third time in John's Gospel we hear Jesus ask, "Who are you looking for?" is John 20:15. Mary Magdalene has gone to the tomb only to find it opened and the body of Jesus missing. As she is engaged in conversation with two angels sitting in the tomb she turns and sees Jesus. He asks her the same question the angels had asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" but Jesus adds, "Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener Mary asks that if he's the one who has taken the body that he tell her where it is and she will go and take it away. But Mary has missed the intent of the questions. "Woman, why are you mourning? Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" As Jesus names her, "Mary," she suddenly recognises him and just wants to cling onto him. Her mourning has turned to joy. The one who was dead is alive. He has called her by name.

On these three significant occasions Jesus asks those who come to him, "Who are you looking for?" At the beginning of his ministry, at the beginning of his agony and death, and at his resurrection, those who came looking for him came looking for the wrong person. Each came looking for less than the Messiah who must suffer and be killed and on the third day rise again. But some, when confronted, came to understand that truly this was the Son of God. They came to know him and to be called by name. Who are you looking for?