

**Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked,
“What do you want?”**

John 1.38

In this season of Epiphany our attention is focused on those early, decisive manifestations or crucial insights (epiphanies) into what God in Jesus Christ is ‘up to’ on the world’s stage.

On the face of it, this morning’s Gospel Reading for this Second Sunday of Epiphany is simply a rerun of the ‘Baptism of Christ’, which we celebrated last Sunday; but this time from St John’s Gospel, . And, true to form, in John’s Gospel, nothing is ever as straightforward as last Sunday’s Gospel Reading from Matthew.

John’s Gospel always takes a deep dive into the heart of what these signs mean. And, in *his* telling of the story, typically, he presses us with a crucial question.

“*What do you want?*” Jesus asks. The old, King James’ version gives a better, more literal, translation. “*What seek ye*”, Jesus asks the two, whom he sees following him. For, more pointedly, Jesus is saying, ‘What is it you *really* Need? What are you after, what do you *Need* with a capital ‘N’?

Now bear with me, as I go off on what might at first seem as a complete tangent.

Currently, slightly unwillingly, I’ve been pressed into reading a book entitled, ‘*Life after Doom: wisdom and courage for a world falling apart*’.¹

It’s by an American Christian, former Pastor and writer. He was raised in a very loving, but religiously strict, Southern Baptist family, so well versed in the belief that God intends to bring the whole world to complete destruction … but not before the Chosen, bible-believing faithful, will be whipped up into heaven, in the great Rapture, and alone be spared.

But over many decades, he broke from this church, and his faith evolved into something completely different and, surprisingly, clear-sighted and sane.

¹ ‘*Life after Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*’, Brian McLaren (2024)

All the same, understanding how a significant (and politically very powerful) portion of the American electorate are happily invested in their materialistic and oil-guzzling lifestyle -

“Global warming, and the destruction of the world and civilization as we know it? Well bring it on! we'll all be okay folks!”

- our author sadly details 4 possible, and plausible scenarios that could play out over the coming decades and centuries, variously obliterating the world as we know it today.

None of the scenarios play out well.

This, of course, could all be dismissed as extremist nonsense; not least by those who have stopped watching the News. But if you do watch the news, then you might well suspect that there are many concerning, and converging, global changes afoot.

Weather patterns are changing, with many more extreme weather events; and each year temperatures reach new record highs. There are more wars driven by the pressures of securing key, but limited natural resources.

There's **ever**more destruction of the natural environment. Inevitably, we see signs of the mass migration of those whose land can no longer feed them.

Many people like to blame 'religion' for all wars and suffering and strife. I can imagine that the author of my book might concede this as a fair estimation, *that is* so long as one's prepared to factor in the new religion of Economic Growth. Economic growth at all costs, even when the resources needed overshoot, wildly, the capacity of our one finite home - planet Earth - to indefinitely sustain its exploitation to serve this new insatiable god.

But, thank goodness, life in the Grantavale Benefice hasn't, noticeably, been impacted by all these global changes.

Apart, that is, from the threats occasioned by Kingsway Solar.

“But surely, we need more 'green' energy to save the Planet” And, of course, to power our economic development; to make us more internationally competitive; to grow *our* economy; to enable increased spending on housing and the NHS; *and* AI (which massively guzzles electricity); and to build up our military defenses against war, because ... well *needs must*?

Yes, indeed: there's a complex web - of our own making - of competing *needs*, in which we find ourselves trapped ... and ever-tumbling in the wrong direction.

So Jesus' question to those two disciples, "What do you *really* think you need?" is as pertinent today as it was 2000 years ago.

When we re-read our gospel passage we begin to suspect that, in fact, those two disciples of John - soon to change their allegiance to become Jesus' disciples - weren't that clear themselves about what they were after, what they really needed. They *didn't* answer that question, "What do you want, what seek ye?"

And, even, John the Baptist says, twice, about Jesus, "I did not know him." I don't know who this Jesus is.

Sure, there are a number of 'titles' sprinkled around, and we may be familiar with them: Lamb of God, God's chosen, 'we have found the Messiah'. But neither John nor the disciples probably had any idea of what God's Chosen, "one who baptises with the *Holy Spirit*", would do for them, and how this was all going to play out.

And although Jesus himself might have taken this golden opportunity, helpfully, to say something deep and meaningful about what their real need was, he doesn't spell this out in any way at all ... at this point.

All he says is, "*Come, and you will see; follow me, spend time in my company and see what it is you really seek, what you really need.*"

And that's always the *same* invitation that Jesus extends to us, too.

Now, you may not be troubled by the News, nor interested in world events. You may be very skeptical about all this talk of global warming, imminent tipping points and ecological disaster, famine and wars, flooding and drought. You may be putting your money on AI, and human resilience and the world leaders coming to their senses just in time.

Or, you may reckon that in *your* lifetime you won't live to see any of those predicted social and environmental disasters anyway. And you may happily be distracted and captivated by all of the short-term pleasures that our

acquisitive culture advertises ... repeatedly. And you may not be overly concerned with bad things happening in the world beyond this village.

But another **key** message from this season of Epiphany is also that the Gospel is for all peoples. The Gospel, the Good News, is to be a *light* for all the world, because God loves all peoples of the world and all individual persons, equally. All Christians are commissioned to shine with this light, and to take it to all corners of the world.

So where might we begin?

We begin each day afresh by following Jesus; by spending time in Jesus' company, and in the company of those who also follow Jesus. Learning from Jesus, and from each other: the truth about ourselves, preoccupied with our secret failings and fears and emptiness; and our many ways of ducking the truth of God's gift of this wonderful planet; ducking God's gifts of love and life within us: a love always reaching for our free response of loving back. And we learn the ways of Truth, Wisdom and Compassion.

Inevitably we'll take a few wrong turns, and our lives may not be free of pain and disappointment, and fear. But *follow me*, says Jesus; and in my company I will give you life, and the power of the Spirit to do the *right* thing, regardless of any *advantage to yourself*.

And whatever happens, this will keep you safe in the Life that I will teach you, and in the Life that I will give you.

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