

What are you looking at? Right now – what are you looking at?

Probably at the start of my sermon, you're looking at me!

Perhaps later in my sermon you'll look elsewhere as you think I'm going on too long, or speaking too fast, or gone off topic .... Perhaps at the end you'll look at me. And you'll see what? Will you see a 6ft 5" man with mostly brown hair and glasses?

Will you see a minister in the Church of England wearing a long white robe (an alb) and a green scarf like thing (called a stole)?

Will you see a father of three?

But what else will you see? Will you actually see, me?

See Sam. Not in full you won't (and I'm sure you're pleased!) – just like I won't see any of you in full!

We don't ever really see each other fully do we? We don't see all of a person, all of their life or background. And we also don't show all of ourselves either ...

We see, but we don't see! Perhaps we just glance.

I think today's gospel passage is one of 'glancing.'

Firstly for us obviously it's not the full picture, it's not the whole of the Gospel of John, nor is it even a whole chapter, its two short snippets. And in some way you could say it's repetitive, it's not saying anything new in the whole bit – surely it's summed up in the IAM bit at the beginning?

But John, the Gospel writer does this for a reason, he does this to draw us deeper in, to draw us in to the scene, to draw us away from an approach in just glancing at a quick saying, a quick sound bite of Jesus and into the narrative. And this morning's sense of just glancing at a passage gives us the same sense that those in the passage described as 'the Jews' have in response to Jesus. Let's look at their response ...

They have been waiting for the all coming conquering Messiah who will ride in and overthrow the Romans! They are desperate for this Messiah to come, they are looking here and there and everywhere and yet not finding him.

Then along comes this guy from Nazareth, whose mother and father they know, who is claiming to have come down from heaven, to be the bread of life!

They are perhaps glancing at Jesus, not taking longer to look and to see and so they quickly dismiss him.

Perhaps it's like when you go shopping for a loaf of bread, you pick up a loaf, give it a quick look over and decide if it's one to buy, or one to put back, it's a bit squashed or something. It's that same quick judgement made here – oh, well we know his Mum and Dad, so he can't be it. Right ... next.

But of course we know from the narrative of Jesus' birth, we hear each year, that they haven't quite grasped the whole picture.

And yet Jesus, he doesn't respond to them, or get drawn in to their questioning, or try and tell them his whole life story, instead he tells them to stop grumbling and explains it very patiently and expands on what he means, he continues: the bread, the life that he is calling us to 'eat' is his own flesh ... to believe and receive eternal life.

Firstly to point out that this comment was just going to annoy the Jews even more. The very idea that you would eat the flesh of another human being was one of the most unclean things that a Jewish person could suggest.

There are clear laws set out for what happens to animals when they are killed and prepared for eating and to eat flesh! In the next few verses the Jewish people do respond quite sharply, perhaps this is out of offence? **PTO**

Now for many of us this is something we are quite familiar with, as we hear these words each week at communion, and in fact during Covid we've just had the bread and so for some of us it has taken on added significance. I wonder if also for some of us it has lost its edge as it were, we've become over familiar with the idea of eating this bread, that we ignore what we are doing ...

Let's explore this symbolism a little more.

Jesus is talking about a really deep faith. A faith, a believing that is taken deep into us, as bread is taken into the body. It's a deeper believing than a mere glance could ever afford us. Jesus is saying the old way leads to death, this way leads to life! The old manna is gone, the new bread of heaven has come.

This is, of course, the life found in the forgiveness of sins, of the wrong we do, through the death of Jesus ... his life given for the life of the whole world. And the new life we are invited to share in, in the light of the resurrection.

To believe, and to receive eternal life. In a deeper sense ... It's an invitation to stop just glancing, to stop jumping from one thing to the next ... to see, and to see fully what is being offered here, to see fully what Jesus is calling his followers, his listeners, us, to.

We live in a fast paced world, a world where at the push of a button, a scroll of a thumb we can go from news story to news story, to comment piece to picture. We can see pictures live moment by moment around the globe – don't get me wrong I think it's amazing but I think it breeds in us a culture of glancing, of not taking things in, of always looking for the next thing.

I wonder if this morning we can take a moment to remember once again the sacrifice Jesus made for each of us, the new life offered to each of us, out of love. As our Ephesians passage, explored with us today, says **in Chapter 5 verse 2**, because Christ loved us he offered his life as a sacrifice to please God. Nothing we could do can ever match up to this. If we take this on board, we believe in a deeper sense, we try to stop just glancing and go a little deeper ...

What might this mean? What does this mean for us today?

I think this is when our faith, our relationship with Jesus moves from mere duty to something that changes our life. Moves from something skin deep to heart.

Has Jesus changed your heart?

Seriously, without trying to use some clichéd saying, has Jesus changed your heart? Has he changed and shaped you right at the very centre of your being?

Have you made that move away from just glancing? Are you beginning to see more fully the life that is being offered here? Something that doesn't just become part of our life, but is our life?

I spoke at the evening service a few weeks ago about 'calling', and about 'vocation', and how many are called to different things and if we allow God to be at work in each of our lives they can be lives lived following that calling ...

That calling into a new job, into a different role in the community, into a different role in our neighbourhood, in our family ... A calling where showing the love of Christ and making him known to those around us is given priority, truth is given forefront, honesty and good speech without bitterness or anger, cursing or rudeness ... full of kindness, mercy and a forgiving spirit. With love as our Guide, as Christ first loved us.

To be a 'Christian' to be 'Christ like' where ever we go, is a challenge, it's impossible in fact – we are only human, and yet out of love, as dear children, loved and known by God we are able to begin to show this love to others.

Today, move from just glancing at Christ, just glancing at God or at Church just doing the little bit, and let Jesus take you deeper in to the abundance of life eternal, promised to all who come to him,

Receive the Bread of Life, and never hunger again.

Amen.