

Sunday 18 January 2026

Liverpool Parish Church

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

OT: Isaiah 49:1-7

NT: I Corinthians 1:1-9

Gp: John 1:29-42

Jesus said to them, 'Come and see'.

Come and see: it is such a simple invitation. Deceptively simple, because it contains hidden depths. This morning, I want to invite us to reflect on what it means to see and be seen, and to be drawn more deeply into the vision of God.

The whole gospel passage we just heard is about looking and seeing. It begins with John the Baptist seeing Jesus and proclaiming that he is the Lamb of God. The story of Jesus' baptism is not presented directly, but only as John recounts what he witnessed. He assures his listeners, 'I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

The following day, John again sees Jesus and says, 'here is the Lamb of God'. Two of John's followers go after this strange figure and as they do so, Jesus turns and sees them. He asks them 'What are you looking for?' When they in turn ask where he is staying, Jesus replies 'Come and see'. And they come, and see, and stay with him.

We might think seeing is a straightforward thing. If we are fortunate enough to have functioning eyes, then we just look and the world is there, laid out for our gaze. These days, we spend a lot of time looking at screens. And maybe that's how we think of seeing in general: as if we were sitting looking out of the windows in our head at the screen of the world.

But of course, we know that seeing is not a straightforward thing. Sometimes, we cannot see what is right in front of us. Or we see only what we want to see. We say 'do you see what I mean,' because seeing is also about understanding, insight, interpretation.

How do we see? How do we see correctly, fully? Is it enough to stare long enough? Is it just a matter of a clear and unobstructed view?

I don't think so. As our gospel story suggests, seeing is first and foremost a relationship. It is a way of giving ourselves to the world and others so they may give themselves to us. It is openness to the gift of truth. To see a person, a situation truly, it is not enough to just take a look. We also need to be transformed by the act of paying attention. Wisdom, compassion, honesty about our own prejudices, courage to respond to the calling of reality: all these are essential to true seeing.

What we see matters. Consider what is happening in America now. Last week, a woman was shot dead by a federal immigration officer. Her name was Renee Good. She was a

mother and wife. And there is video evidence of what happened. And yet, people claim to see completely different things. For some, she is an innocent victim of state murder. For others, she brought her death on herself because she tried to run over a law enforcement officer.

In light of this, it is tempting to say that there is no truth: what we see depends on our prejudices. We see what we want to see. As Christians, we cannot accept that. Truth should not be defined by the loudest voice or the strongest army, which is what happens when there is no objectivity.

I believe, if we look closely, we see a woman trying to get away from threatening masked state enforcers. But to interpret this event we need also to see and understand the context in which it takes place: a time of state terror. A time in which the president of the USA, in the immediate aftermath of the event, declared - without evidence or investigation – that Renee Good was a domestic terrorist.

If I say this only because of my political preferences, then I would not be seeing properly. We do need to be critical of our own prejudices, of all that distorts our vision. But we cannot look away or take refuge in relativism.

Seeing demands insight. It also at times demands that we take a stand. It calls us to decide: who are we following? Where do we stay, where do we root ourselves? Does our seeing come from connection and compassion, rather than coercion?

We might say something similar about the situation in Iran. What do state security forces see when they gun down protestors? They see enemies, terrorists, foreign agitators. They have lost the capacity to connect, to see in relationship with the other. And so they kill and control what they do not understand.

John the Baptist was a victim of state terror. So were most of the disciples who appear in the gospels. So, of course, was Jesus himself. To see him as the image and icon of God, the Word made flesh, is to be reminded that God truly appears in the flesh and face of the other person. To see him as the Lamb of God is to be reminded that God comes to us sacrificially. He confronts our violence with peace, our refusal to see with the display of his forgiveness on the cross, our love of power with the power of his love, our lies with reality.

Jesus invites us to come and see. To dwell with him, in the place where we can truly learn to see. But before that is possible, Jesus sees *us*. Jesus sees us searching, getting it wrong, trying, making a mess of things. Jesus sees us: and that look is one of pure grace. In his eyes, we are truly seen. We are known. We are loved by a love that has no ego or agenda other than we should live in fullness of life and communion with God and one another. And we are given the gift of sight.

Looking and seeing are not simple. We need to learn them, receive them as gifts. Our looking can be blinkered and hard. There is a kind of look – like the male gaze – which wants to reduce what it sees to an object it can possess and control. Some ways of seeing are narrow, violent and without any self-knowledge.

Jesus teaches us another way to look. Yes, we are called to look to him, the image of God. But we are also called to look *from* him. To see, with his eyes, the presence of God in all creation. To see, with his eyes, the beauty and promise that is marred by sinful pride and distorted relationships. As Paul writes in our second reading, we are 'called into the fellowship of God's son, Jesus Christ our Lord'. Not just to believe things *about* him, but to live *in* him, who lives in us.

God in Christ invites us to share his life. To stay with him, to dwell with him. To be those who look at the world with the eyes of God's fierce love.

The first letter of John was probably written by the same person or community which produced the gospel we call John's. That letter begins with these words:

'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.'

May we see the love of God offered to us here this morning: in communion with a suffering world, in the gifts of bread and wine that we see and touch with our hands as God unites his heart and his vision to ours.

Fr Steven Shakespeare