

WHO IS IT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR?

1 Cor 15: 20-28;

John 20:1-18

It's true, isn't it, that often we tend to see what we want to see, or what it is we are really looking for. What one is looking for can determine what one ends up seeing. So the question Jesus asks Mary is an important one. 'Who is it you are looking for?' It was an important question for Mary; it's also an important question for us.

Obviously, Mary was looking for Jesus, but which Jesus was she was seeking? Well, when she arrived, she was obviously looking for a Jesus who was dead and buried. She had come to the tomb to pay her last respects to her dead friend. She had a deep love for him and so many good memories. But that's all that He could be now for her – a memory. That's the Jesus she was looking for.

And that's the Jesus that some are still looking for – a Jesus who lived 2000 years ago in Palestine. What He did and taught continues to inspire them. In their thoughts they may even stand at Calvary with deep emotion welling up within us. But nonetheless, the Jesus they are looking for is dead – He belongs in the past. But if that's the Jesus we are after, he is not only confined to the past but He is also an impostor. He is certainly not someone worth seeking out.

What do I mean by that? Well, didn't He say that He would rise from the dead? Didn't He say to His disciples, 'I will be with you always'? If He is just a memory, then He is not worth remembering. Who wants to honour someone who made claims that He didn't keep; who made promises He didn't fulfil? Paul put it this way to the Corinthians, 'If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins.' The gospels were not written to try and convince people of the resurrection. The gospels were written because of the resurrection. If there had been no resurrection there would have been no gospels either.

Mary came to the tomb looking for a Jesus who would forever be confined to the past. But then, suddenly, Mary realises that this one she is speaking to is Jesus. What a wonderful moment it is. Perhaps she recognises Jesus when she hears him speaking her name, as he had done so often before. 'Mary'. And that can be our experience too. For each of us can know Jesus speaking our name. Can you hear it? He speaks your name with the same love and emotion as he spoke the name of Mary.

I can imagine Mary suddenly thinking to herself, 'How wonderful; things are again as they were before the horror of Good Friday.' She must have felt like she had just woken up from a horrible nightmare. Now her life could go back to what it was before. But that question of Jesus to Mary remains – 'Who is it that you are looking for?' Is it the human Jesus you knew before? Is it the Jesus who walked with you, Mary, and taught you and shared meals with you? No, it's not. Jesus is not merely the human Jesus she had known. Jesus wants Mary to realise that He is more than the human Jesus she was so familiar with. That's possibly why He says to her, 'Don't hold onto me; don't hold onto the human person that you knew me as – for I am so much more than that.'

Mary needs to see the bigger picture; she needs to have her mind and her vision broadened. We can fall into the same error. The Jesus we are looking for may be merely a Jesus who is a friend; a Jesus whom it is good to have around; a Jesus who can help us out of difficult situations and advise us in difficult decisions. But like Mary we need the broader picture. We need to see a Jesus who, yes, is a friend and companion, but who is also so much more – a Jesus who is the Lord to be worshiped and obeyed.

It's a bit like having a close friend with whom you worked for a long time. Then there comes the day when this friend is promoted to being the CEO of your company. Suddenly the relationship changes. The friendship is still there, but there is a new element of authority and respect that comes into play.

Jesus says to Mary, 'Who is it you are looking for?' In the space of a few minutes Mary had to move from considering Jesus as a dead friend fondly remembered, to a Jesus who was once again alive and with her as before, to a Jesus who loves and cares for her as much as ever but who is also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to be worshiped and adored.

Who is it that you and I are looking for today? Which of those pictures do we have of Jesus – a dead hero, a living companion or a glorified Lord? Another way of putting it is like this – is it just ME, or ME and JESUS or JESUS and ME?

In the first one it's just me; me on my own seeking to live the Christian life, honouring the example and teachings of a Jesus of 2000 years ago.

Or is it ME AND JESUS – knowing Jesus is risen and alive and with me. But it's still me first and Jesus there for me when I need Him. He's there for me, rather than me being there for Him

Or is it JESUS and ME – JESUS first and foremost and ME following faithfully -not a case of Jesus only being there for me, but me being there for Jesus – alert and obedient to His every word.

Perhaps another way of saying all this is to talk of mind and heart and will. The Jesus of 2000 years ago is a Jesus in our mind; intellect. The Jesus of the heart is the Jesus for whom we feel a love and affection as a companion and friend. The Jesus of the will is also the Jesus for whom we feel affection, but more than that it is the Jesus who controls my will. The one on the throne of my life; the one holding the steering wheel of my future.

'Who is it that you are looking for?'