

### **What are you looking for?**

It is a question Janet and I ask our adult children every time they come round to the Vicarage and decide to go through all the cupboards in the kitchen, one by one! It's a question we ask the grandchildren when they are wandering around the house looking puzzled, or in the "toy room" tipping out all the containers on to the floor and making a massive mess.

It's a roundabout question we get asked when we go shopping. I went in to David Jones the other day with Janet, they had a big sale on and she wanted to have a look around, so I wandered around the Menswear department looking for cheap stuff! "Can I help you sir!" Just a round about way of asking me, "What I was looking for."

Then it's a question we often ask ourselves, especially at this time of the year. What else are New Years resolutions than an answer to the question, "What am I looking for?" Losing weight. Getting fit. Going to the gym. Improving my golf score. Saving more. Enjoying myself more. Travelling more. Learning a craft. Taking up a new hobby. Changing a behaviour. All in some way, a part answer to that question,

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It's a question we can ask of others as well. Vladimir Putin, what's he looking for? Kevin McCarthy, the newly appointed Speaker of the US House of Representatives, what's he looking for? Prince Harry, what's he looking for?

Over the Christmas break I have been doing a bit of reading and I've just finished a great book by the English author John Lancaster called Capital. It's a novel set in one particular street in London during the early 2000's. It has a vast and great variety of characters all offering their take on what it's like to live in what was then, the financial hub of Europe.

One of the characters is a woman who has escaped as a political refugee from Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, she is in that no mans land of having nowhere to call home. She can't go back to her homeland because her life is in danger, but she isn't able to become an English citizen because her case has not yet come up for trial by the British Immigration Service. So, she is trapped. She lives in a Refuge Centre with a group of people in similar circumstances, and has been doing this for many years.

By a number of devious means, for which she pays a high price financially, she has been able to get a job as a parking warden and patrols the street in which the novel is set. Her name is Quentina.

As well as being a refuge, Quentina is a Christian and sees life in London from a very different perspective from those around her.

"Quentina felt that she had some experience of the world, and of people other than at their best, but she had never known a subject on which people became irrational as quickly and completely, as that of parking, in this absurdly rich, absurdly comfortable country. When you gave people a ticket, they were angry, always and inevitably. And the anger could spread, and become catching as it had with this plainly mad woman, crazed with resentments. There were times when she wanted to say: Get down on your knees! Be grateful! A billion people living on a dollar a day, as many who can't find clean drinking water, you live in a country where there is a promise to feed, clothe, shelter and doctor you, from the moment of your birth to the moment of your death, for free, where the state won't come and beat you or imprison you or conscript you, where the life expectancy is one of the

longest in the world, where the government does not lie to you about aids, where the music is not bad, and the only bad thing is the climate, and you find it in yourself to complain about parking? Woe, woe! Down on your knees in gratitude that you even notice this minor irritation! Praise God for the fact that you resent getting this ticket, instead of rendering your clothes with grief, because you lost another child to dysentery or malaria! Sing Hosannas when you fill out the little green form in the envelope stuck to your windshield! For you, you of the deservedly punished five-minute overstay, you of the misinterpreted residents bay area, you of the ignored Loading Only sign, are of all people to have lived, the most fortunate!”

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There is something about this question which strikes at the heart of what our lives are all about. As Quentina has observed, even when we have almost everything we could ever need, we are not satisfied. We look at Prince Harry and wonder, what more could he want? We look around and even as we look at ourselves, at this resolutions part of the year, we can ask, where are we going with this?

### **What are we looking for?**

Our Scriptures for today suggest some answers to this question as we begin this new year, as we enter this season of Epiphany.

Isaiah suggests we look for the Messiah. Paul, the good news about what has happened to us in this Messiah. The gospel of John ... that we look for Jesus.

### **What are we looking for?**

For each of us that's a unique question. It might be something to eat as we go through our parents' cupboards like teenagers. A new toy to play with while we are at Nana and Grandad's. A pair of shorts at the shop. A new lease on life, control of a behaviour, a new way of doing things.

It might be new way of seeing. Of appreciating what we have. Of not allowing small things to overwhelm us, when we have so much already.

It might be that it is more fundamental than this. We might need a completely new orientation. A completely new way of living, or at least some help with doing that.

Whichever of these things it is, if we look for the Messiah... Jesus ... if we grab hold of the good news of what that means for us, then these things will be come clear and even possible.

Because it is in this looking and seeing, that we become what Epiphany calls us to be, heralds like John the Baptist and his followers, shouting, “Hey! Look! See!” God is alive, and in our midst, and could be in yours. The Holy Spirit is at work in us and through us and even in spite of us. And could be in you.

Here ... is the Lamb of God ... for us ... and for you.

...

### **What are we looking for?**

**Amen.**