**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

Writers sometimes talk about the importance of ‘concrete significant detail’ in their fiction. It's the difference between: He was driving along the road and: He was on the M62 crossing the Pennines and the winter sun was low in the sky. Concrete significant detail lets the reader know that the writer knows what they are talking about and wants to draw their audience into the story. It conveys credibility. Good storytellers include not what is just concrete, but what is significant to the flow and the theme of the story they are telling.

Biblical writers also knew about using concrete significant detail. David had beautiful eyes, we are told in the first book of Samuel. The tree Zacchaeus climbed was a sycamore tree. Luke’s gospel. And then in the gospel reading this morning from John’s gospel, we hear: It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. Concrete detail. But is it significant too?

At our monthly Come and See sessions – the second Monday of the month, 8pm in the Belli Centre for those who might be interested – one of the things we have taken to doing regularly is a Bible reading ‘technique’ called Lectio Divina. When you sit in silence with a particular passage, sometimes a sentence or phrase floats up and claims your attention.

And this gospel passage this morning is one that I love largely because it **is** the Come and See one – the one after which the group was named. ‘It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.’ What is it with that? We have questions: is it still light? Getting dark? What time of the year is this? Why mention the time of day at all if the meaning isn’t important?

Since the incarnation of Jesus is at the root of John’s gospel – all that Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us stuff – then we have to understand that time matters. Human life happens in time. Important events are not general references -- we don’t say: we got married in the morning *sometime* or the baby was born *sometime* in the evening. We remember key moments with particularity. It was a Tuesday. It was ten past five. The service started at 2.30pm. People remember when they got a diagnosis, or where they were when they heard JFK or Diana had died. Life happens in time. We each happen in time.

So no wonder then that the time of the first encounter of these men with Jesus had to be recorded specifically. The time helps us know that it mattered. It anchors the event. And time matters in this story, not only because it mattered to those early disciples, but to remind us of God’s time. With the birth of Jesus, God entered into time when God didn’t actually have to. God chose to be limited by time when God didn’t need to. God decided time matters when omnipresence – being everywhere all at once - could give God a very easy get-out clause. For these first disciples, about four o'clock in the afternoon was the first time they were invited by Jesus to abide. Not just come and see, but come and be. With the man who was God. That was a significant moment in their lives.

If we really want to fathom why the church is in decline, we need to know and to notice how frightened people are by the idea of evangelism. Wearing my clerical collar some years ago, I was stopped by a well-meaning Christian in the main shopping square in Truro, just across from the bus station, and asked if I had been … something, either born again or saved, I forget which. And being challenged like that, as a Christian of a few years standing, and a newly-ordained person wearing the badge to boot, I should have been prepared to enter the discussion. But to my eternal shame I wasn’t. I went all British and pleaded a hurry to get somewhere I think. It is hard to be on the end of someone else’s idea of what a Christian ought to be. And I didn’t want to fail.

And then there is the feeling that religion isn’t something people talk about in polite society; that one’s faith is private; or the desire not to be perceived as one of *those* people – the in your face ones. And all that stunts our own ability to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. John’s story of Jesus’ baptism might be the perfect reading to invite us not only to admit our dis-ease with evangelism but also to begin to overcome it.

Except this isn’t exactly John’s account of Jesus’ baptism; not the way it is told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke anyway. Each of those three tells of Jesus coming to John the Baptism to be baptized, describes the arrival of the dove, and shares the message spoken by the heavenly voice. But John is different. That is why the others are called the Synoptic Gospels – because they share things in common, whereas John’s has a very different style and purpose. And here today, what we get is a second-hand account of the baptism. John doesn’t actually baptize Jesus in this gospel; he just shares what he sees.

And that might just be the bigger point made by this story: that when it comes to our own relationship with Jesus, our main job is to see and share. Not threaten, coerce, intimidate, woo, wheedle or plead, but simply to see and to share. That is all John the Baptist does here. He sees the dove descend upon Jesus and tells other people. That’s all. Later, Andrew does the same. He tells his brother what he and John’s other disciples saw -- the person they believe is the Messiah -- and suggests Peter comes along and sees for himself.

Maybe that’s how simple it ought to be. At rock bottom, evangelism is noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing that with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves.

And I have come to that conclusion because this isn’t only what John the Baptist does, and it’s not only what Andrew does. It’s also what Jesus does. When Jesus notices some of John’s disciples following him, he asks them what they are looking for. They counter by asking where he is staying. He doesn’t give them a straight answer; he doesn’t question them any further. All he does in response is issue the invitation: Come and see.

Notice. Share. Invite.

Some meetings of the Deanery chapter, and some PCC meetings I have seen in the past, have begun with just five minutes of people taking turns to name somewhere they have seen God at work that week – in the world or in their own lives. By acts like that, we develop the habit of noticing what God is doing. A friend of mine is priest in charge of a parish in West Yorkshire where the food bank has been vandalised three times since October. But people pull together every time and work to fix what is broken or donate to fill gaps in the stock so that those who are obliged to use the foodbank won’t go hungry. That has been shared on Facebook. I would like to invite you to think about where you have seen God at work in the past week.

Or maybe, since at first that might be difficult, we just think about those places we saw where God needed to be -- places of distress or hurt or sadness - and then over time we will get better at noticing where God actually is. We develop the capacity to see God in our lives and the world.

How can we learn to share, when our Britishness shrinks away from doing it? It could be as simple as telling someone why you come to church – either at all, or in particular why you come to this one. There’s the story of the old man who never knew why his own wife came to church until they were asked to do this very exercise. And vice versa, obviously.

And then inviting. Which is the hardest bit of all. We are often quite good at inviting people to clubs or quizzes or sports events. Just not to church. And yet, church hosts all sorts of events – including quizzes, flower festivals, meals, concerts. Maybe that is a possible start? - an event brings the stranger into the setting in which it is easier to explain how peaceful the atmosphere is after a hard week at work, or whatever. And people actually like to be invited to things. Sometimes it’s just hard to do it by yourself and easier if you have someone to go with.

Of course, one sermon isn’t going to suddenly make everyone feel comfortable with evangelism or create the confidence to share our faith. But one sermon can be a beginning.

Notice. Share. Invite.

John the Baptist did. Jesus got his first disciples. And the rest is history. Two thousand years on, we can do our bit to make sure the message continues.

**Amen**