

## **A New Commandment**

U2 is a famous Irish rock band, one of the worlds's top selling artists, peaking in the 80's, whose second number one hit was, *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*.

A song that touches the human soul, as it asks the perennial question that we all face in life – what are we all looking for?

The meaning behind the song can be seen as a reflection of the human condition, where individuals constantly seek fulfilment and purpose in their lives.

Bono, the lead vocalist and songwriter of U2, has mentioned that the song is about the search for spiritual redemption, and the desire to find something greater than oneself. The lyrics express a sense of yearning, and the feeling of being incomplete, despite the achievements and successes one may have.

When Bono wrote these words, “I still haven't found what I'm looking for?” he knew that he was speaking and singing into a generation of people looking for something in life...searching for truth...searching for meaning. Perhaps he was there himself; but he asks a question, that every generation asks, the Rolling Stones, sang, “I Can't Get No Satisfaction” the Beatles, “Help, I Need Somebody”.

Jesus also spoke into a generation of people searching for God, people crying out, I have no satisfaction, I need someone to help me. I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

Jesus met a lonely woman at a well in Samaria in the heat of the midday sun, she came to draw water, but Jesus saw that the water she needed was not physical but spiritual, *the water I give you will satisfy your inner thirst*, he said. If you read this story closely in John's gospel, you will discover that Jesus had to go this way. He had to go for this woman was thirsting for God.

That day she left the well knowing that she had found what she was looking for.

Nicodemus, was one of Israel's most important religious leaders, who came to Jesus in the dark, seeking spiritual light, and Jesus told him that he must be born again; if he was to find what he was looking for it would involve a complete new beginning and as we know gradually Nicodemus came to the light as he attended to Jesus after his crucifixion.

All around Jesus, he could see people crying out for God's love, mercy, and grace.

He knew that the religion of his day was not satisfying the souls of his people. He knew that within each person is a soul which hungers and thirsts and can only be filled by the grace of God.

The younger generation in Jesus' day were also lost, and this was highlighted by a rich young ruler who comes to him, and he says to Jesus, "what must I do to inherit eternal life". Jesus could see that this young man had everything that this world could offer, and yet he wasn't satisfied – this young man was saying to him, the words of Bono, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for", and so Jesus challenges him, "you know the commandments". "Yes, of course I do", he said, "I have obeyed them carefully" - Jesus looked into his heart and said, "there is still one thing that is keeping you back from the Kingdom of God and it's buried deep in your heart. Your problem is not material but spiritual. If you want to inherit this eternal life, then you must let go of the greed that has gripped you from inside."

"You still haven't found what you're looking for, because your heart's desires are keeping you back. Go and sell and give to the poor and come and follow me and you will have treasure in heaven." Sadly, this young man's face fell, and he went away sad, because the commitment was too much.

What am I looking for, what are you looking for? Have we found it?

Is it a search that continues throughout our lives? Do we ever completely find it?

Today, on the third Sunday of Lent, we are focusing on the object of the journey.

What are we searching for?

I suppose that's my question to us all this morning, "what is your life journey about?"

Three thousand years ago, the Israelites were on a journey, a journey that was through a desert. They had escaped the cruelty of Egypt; they had crossed the Red Sea, escaped from their cruel task masters, who were coming behind them, to take them back, but God intervened and closed the Red Sea on their attackers.

So, now they are in the lonely desert, in the land that we know today as Saudi Arabia. They had been promised a dream, a material land of milk and honey, a land of promise and opportunity, a land of new beginnings, but that didn't materialise, and they are stuck in the desert. They haven't found what they are looking for... because they are looking for it in the wrong things, in the wrong direction. They wanted a land of milk and honey, but there was another land that they were neglecting, and that was the spiritual land of their souls.

The desert land was not only physical but also spiritual.

Stuck in the sand, stuck in the endless days of desert heat, and lack of food and as you can imagine, with thousands and thousands of people, arguably the greatest exodus ever, and they begin to wilt and argue and grumble, and Moses, well, he gets a hard time. He's the leader and people quickly turn on him, and they challenged him, "you brought us out here to die!"

But God provides a way when there was no way.

In the desert of Sinai, under Mount Sinai, Moses is called by God to go up to the mountain top. It is here that he receives, what has become known as the Ten Commandments. In Moses' time, they were called Ten Words. Ten words that would eventually change the world; ten words that would give this people a purpose, a direction and a discovery.

The Ten Commandments have stood the test of time. These commandments have framed our societies and are the backbone to our morality. These commandments are God sent and they are written into the fabric of our universe. God spoke, and his words have echoed down through the history of mankind ever since. These commandments were there to create community, to protect people, and to bring people closer to God.

The first four are about our relationship with the Almighty, the next six are about our relationship with each other. When they are truly lived out, we can say, we have found what we are looking for, and that is the Kingdom of God in our hearts and in our world.

Here in these ten words, the people of Israel found what they were looking for. They discovered God's will and purpose for their lives. The first four are about putting God first, the next six are about loving our neighbour.

By the time of Jesus, there were 632 different commandments to obey, and rather than protecting God's people, they were being used to define God's

people, who were in, and who were out of the circle. If you were to be in the circle, then you had to obey all the purity laws which were difficult and challenging for the common and ordinary people. So many common people found themselves excluded from being the people of God.

So that's the world that Jesus inherited, and he saw merchants in the Temple, literally fleecing ordinary people, by exchanging their money for temple money, so that they could buy doves and lambs to be a sacrifice to God, for the laws that they could not obey. This was their payment to have their sins forgiven.

Jesus was outraged by the scandal in the Church, so much so, that he started to overthrow the tables and chase those unscrupulous people out of the Temple. "This is God's house, a house of prayer and you have turned it into a den of robbers."

According to Mark's gospel, not too long after this, Jesus is teaching and a leader of the Jewish law hears him, and challenges him with a question, "of all the commandments which is the most important?"

Jesus immediately replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as you love yourself. There is no greater commandment than these."

In those few words, Jesus sums up the purpose for our lives for all human beings; he shows to them, what they have been looking for, and in doing so, he also sums up the 10 commandments, and makes it into a statement, that everyone can understand and make their own response.

Those big questions, Why am I here? What is my life purpose? What am I looking for? Jesus said, "To love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbour as you love yourself. There is no greater commandment."

If those two commands are our aim and goal in life, then we will live pleasing to God, and pleasing to our neighbours, and we will have peace and blessed assurance, for we will live in God's will.

I started by asking the question, that U2 asked some 40 years ago now, "have you found what you are looking for?" Jesus invites us to, "ask, and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you."

Amen