If you look at the front of your service booklet, you’ll see what has become known as the “Coventry Welcome”, words which I was sent in a slightly different form a long time before I came here, and which I rewrote slightly to include in a sermon two summers ago. They were well received, the Precentor decided to use them as one of our front covers – and then someone posted a photo on Facebook and the world went slightly mad. At one point I was getting up to 100 emails enquiries per week about the text, and it was providing a conversation starter with people who had very little idea of what a cathedral might be for, or why they should even consider that they might WANT to visit. Oddly enough, after a bit of a lull, it has recently generated vast interest once again – so much so that I spent a bit of time yesterday recording an interview for the American radio station npr….It’s all rather exciting for middle-aged cleric on a dull day in January!

The thing is that, while I’m not sure we actually manage to live up to it ALL the time, that welcome statement is surely a reflection of where we ought to be going as a Church community. We are here because we believe that we’re onto something rather wonderful – something too good to keep to ourselves….and that must surely mean that we are committed to sharing that with any and every one, no matter who they are, where they come from, what they look like.

So– let’s take that as a given.
We WANT people to join us for worship.
We WANT them to know there is space for them here, come what may.

But what next?

What do we do for those who’ve made it over the threshold, who’ve coped with the strange but beautiful patterns of word and music that make up our liturgy, who’ve possibly even dared to stay for coffee?
How do we take them on the journey from curious visitor to frequent attender to engaged Christian disciple?
If you have, how did you make that journey yourself?
Can you remember?

Perhaps it started with another question – though probably not one you were asked directly.
It’s the question from our gospel reading
“*What are you looking for?”*
If that was the very first thing that was said to you here, it might seem rather abrupt. I suspect that mid-week visitors to the Cathedral are sometimes confronted with a rather similar question, enough to make the uncertain turn and flee.
Nevertheless it’s a question that needs answering.
What are you looking for, that brings you here week by week.
Is it inspiring worship or engaging teaching? Is it a community of like-minded people? Or is maybe, just maybe, a sense of the presence of the Living God.
What are you looking for?

In John’s gospel that’s the beginning of everything for these, the first of Christ’s disciples.

They’ve been looking for something for a while.
Following John, listening to his words - and when he speaks about Jesus with such confidence, they are fired up by his words
"*Here is the Lamb of God !"*
What, here? Now?
They set off to find out more.
Lacking the confidence to approach Jesus directly, they walk a few paces behind him, playing follow my leader wherever he goes.
Already it seems that he is not so much lamb as shepherd.
Sooner or later, he spots them, turns, holds their gaze.
They are stopped in their tracks as he asks
“What are you looking for?”

It’s a straightforward question, perfectly reasonable.
If two complete strangers were dogging your every step, you’d want to know why.
But, of course it is also a question with a host of deeper meanings.
One of the biggest questions of faith

What are they looking for?

There's a song by the rock group U2 that might have been written for today’s gospel. It's the story of a quest - climbing the highest mountains, scaling city walls - only to conclude
“But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for”

These men have been with John for long enough to be classified as his disciples.
They have responded to his fiery message of repentance – it has touched something in them.
But it isn’t enough.
They still haven’t found what they’re looking for.
John himself has pointed them towards Jesus.
They are hungry, like so many others, - but hungry for what?
Hungry for healing?
Hungry for reassurance?
Hungry for change?
Hungry for justice...?
Hungry to belong?
Who knows –they certainly don’t.
All they know is that something is wrong with their world and it needs to be set right, that they still haven’t found what they seek.
“What are you looking for?” asks Jesus, and to this crucial question they really have no answer.

So often the questions of our faith are not the obvious tidy ones...the ones that can be addressed by a catechism or an Alpha course.
We find ourselves here - drawn to church, to faith, by an unnameable, inexplicable longing....the restlessness that Augustine noted when he wrote
“God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you”

We wrestle with doubts.
We will not always like the church, or feel certain of our faith.
We may go through patches when, like T S Eliot’s Magi, we are convinced that “this was all folly”, but somehow we keep coming back, almost despite ourselves.
“What are you looking for?”

It’s a question that could open the door onto all sorts of undreamed of worlds...a question that just might force us to confront the needs and longings that we try to stifle...a question worth asking yourself, I'm sure.

As a priest, it’s a question I don’t think I ask enough - though I often try to explore it when parents come to discuss their child’s baptism.
In my anxiety to welcome all comers, I sometimes miss out on the need to challenge them. I may know in the depths of my heart that in Christ every human need and longing is met, every anxious question answered - but if I don’t explore exactly what it is that brings people through our doors, how can I help to serve them?
I’d love to know of your own hopes, fears and expectations...to spend time exploring together “What are you looking for?”

And the way the disciples respond - isn't it classic!
The sort of trivial remark I too tend to blurt out when confronted by a situation that suddenly seems to be rather more intense, more serious that I had bargained for...I need something to fill the gap, to cover my embarrassment, so I witter away...
“Ummm...(Thinking wildly) ......Where are you staying?”

Jesus’ answer is a simple but wonderful invitation.
“No one and see!”

Some years ago, I was given this passage to pray with on retreat.
I was asked to place myself somewhere in the story, and so in my imagination, I found myself accompanying the disciples along the river bank, never letting Jesus out of my sight.
Like them I blushed and stuttered as he turned and spoke to me directly...and like them I was unable to resist the invitation to “Come and see”

And that day, as I imagined a small dark room in a sugar cube house (based in my mind’s eye entirely on the line drawings that illustrated the Good News Bible), Jesus invited me to spend the day with him...and at lunch time he took bread, broke it and placed some in my hand.

And then I realised that what I was looking for, the place where he was staying was right there...right here...Jesus in you...Jesus in me...Jesus in bread and wine....

Come and see.