Isaiah 49.1-7, Joh 1.29-42: Finch: Epiphany 2 Year B

I have no intention of spoiling any of the details of the Glass Onion, the Netflix Christmas hit which I imagine a lot of you may have seen- it has flaws but it is a deliciously excessive murder-mystery set on a Greek island owned by one of the wealthiest men in the world. It has a lot of moving parts and different narratives but at the heart of it is a simple story. And at the centre of the story is Benoit Blanc, the moral, observant and inspired Southern Detective played by Daniel Craig, who is the only one who has the wisdom and the instinct to stand and see what is truly happening all around him, to see truth.

This is not an advert for Netflix- other streaming services are available- but it is definitely an appreciation of Daniel Craig, as well as being an introduction to a Gospel reading which has a huge amount of story packed in and implied but is still, really, a simple story with a still heart- a simple story, with the stillness and the wisdom to truly see what is there.

There is enormous difference between being glanced at and being seen. There is enormous difference between scanning something and seeing what is truly there in front of us. There is enormous difference between having the self we show to the world accepted and being truly seen for who we are, for the person God knows us to be and made us to be and is longing for us to become.

A simple story at heart, about seeing with the heart and not with the eyes, about knowing with the heart and having our heart and the heart of who we are seen and known, known and accepted, accepted and loved.

A simple story at heart- about seeing Jesus and allowing that knowledge to change everything.

So, what can we see? At the heart of our Gospel this morning is the simple truth of having the baton passed from John the Baptist- who saw Jesus coming towards him- to Jesus, the true light coming into the world. All eyes are on John who is still baptizing and proclaiming and he turns their gaze to Jesus, who he sees, and who he wants those who’ve come to listen to him to see and know.

He redirects them, he refocuses them, by explaining who Jesus is with a list of titles which show that he has not just seen Jesus but truly sees him- the Lamb of God, who the Spirit descended on and remained on, the Son of God. He sees Jesus as he is, and inspires the crowd and his own disciples to do the same.

A simple story of handing the baton on. There is something very final and very beautiful in the fact that when he says on the next morning *here is the Lamb of God* two of his disciples turn and follow Jesus immediately. They take with them our gaze and the gaze of John the Gospel writer- then Jesus turns and sees them following him- he *sees* them- and he asks “What are you looking for?” What are you *looking* for?”

Normally you’d expect a sense of regret and sadness, bitterness, in a leader and teacher who’s followers move on and abandon him- but that is not the way with John the Baptist. He has done his job to perfection. He has prepared the way and his final act in launching Jesus is to pass on to Jesus some of his disciples, who have begun to learn the ways of the Kingdom from him. He is not disappointed that they leave him to go on with Jesus- he is delighted.

We are told that one of the two is Andrew the fisherman, and that he brings his brother Simon Peter with him, the one who is to be the Rock on whom the Church is built. We don’t know the other- NT Wright speculates that it is the Gospel writer himself- but this is clearly a bit of the story about Andrew and Simon Peter and the name of the other disciple is not important.

John sees Jesus and tells everyone with clarity who he is- Lamb of God, Son of God, Dwelling of the Holy Spirit- and he follows that up by inspiring two of his disciples to see Jesus and to become his disciple, and those two bring with them Simon Peter, who becomes the leader of the disciples and the founder of the Church.

Baton delivered. Trained and committed disciples passed on. Jesus- Lamb of God, Son of God- launched. Amid the complexity, a simple core. And coming into focus, speaking for the first time in the whole Gospel of John, seeing everything, seeing everyone, is Jesus.

Seeing is woven throughout the whole of the reading- seeing with the heart. John knows Jesus when he sees him coming back from the wilderness after 40 days. The disciples see Jesus as John tells them who he is and they follow. And above all, wonderfully, Jesus sees them. He knows who Peter will be immediately- dragged from his nets by his brother who rushes to him and tells him that they have found the Messiah- and Jesus looks at him- not only at his face but at his heart- and tells him that he is Cephas, the rock on which he will build the Church. He looked at him and knew him.

These are the very first words Jesus says in the Gospel of John- “What are you looking for? Come and see.” Could it be any better? Could it be any more inspiring and encouraging and hopeful? Jesus turns to the disciples and he sees them. He sees their hopes and their possibility. He sees their longing and their gifts. He sees their vulnerabilities and their secrets. He sees them and he loves them. And he asks them: What are you looking for? Come and see.

And today, through this reading, and through this Eucharist, Jesus turns to you and he sees you. He sees you hopes and your possibility. He sees your longing and your gifts. He sees your vulnerabilities and your secrets. He sees you and he loves you. He sees you and he loves you. He sees you. He loves you. And he asks: What are you looking for? Come and see.

All of which leaves us, I think, with two questions.

The first is: who can we, like John the Baptist, show Jesus to? Who can we point Jesus out to? Who can we share Jesus with, and explain who Jesus is? Who can we help to see Jesus? It could be someone sat near you now who is struggling to settle or to make sense of things. It could be someone sat near you now who is battling something. It could be a friend, a neighbour, a Godchild, a child- but who can we help to see Jesus?

And the second is: What are you looking for? What do you need? What do you long for? Jesus is asking- make sure you don’t leave this sacred space without responding.

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A simple story at heart- about seeing Jesus and allowing that knowledge to change everything. What are you looking for? Jesus says. Come and see.

Let us pray:

Loving Lord Jesus, we thank you that you see us.

We thank you that you know us and love us.

Help us to see you too, to know you and to love you, Lamb of God, Son of God, the one on whom the Spirit dwells. Amen.