

Year A Second Sunday after the Epiphany What are You Seeking Come and See

“What are you seeking?” “Where are you staying?” “Come and see.”

This short exchange between the two disciples and Jesus, echoes the longing in each of our hearts and provides us with a model of invitation so that when we *do* find what we are seeking, we can share it joyfully with others around us.

Two of John’s disciples are standing with John when he spots Jesus and says, “Look, there is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples immediately leave John to follow Jesus and we might be thinking, “What? Really? That’s all it takes for people to follow Jesus?” No, of course not. John had already explained who Jesus is...not only “Lamb of God” but also “Chosen One”, the one on whom the Holy Spirit rested and remained. Why were these descriptions of Jesus so important to those disciples? Why did they mean so much...causing the disciples to leave one teacher in favour of another?

To say that the Holy Spirit remained on Jesus was very significant. When David is anointed as the king of Israel, we are told that the Holy Spirit remained on David from that day onward (1 Samuel 16:13). But David is the only person of whom this is said in the Old Testament. To have the Holy Spirit remain with Jesus, then, is amazing and unusual. It also connects Jesus to David – the one from whom the Messiah was to descend. This explains John’s use of the title, “Chosen One” but why does “Lamb of God” excite these disciples?

We may hear “Lamb of God” and think of a lamb being sacrificed. But that is not, actually, the primary connection that the Jewish people would have made.

Remember, I’ve mentioned before that you can’t get too far into talking about our Story of Salvation without the Exodus story popping up, right? The Hebrew people

are rescued out of oppression in Egypt not through the sacrifice of a lamb but through the blood of a lamb that was the main course at dinner. The blood of the lamb was spread on the outside door frame and, when the angel of death went by through the night, he passed over the homes that had this blood spread on the door frame. This was the immediate pre-cursor to the escape of the entire Hebrew population from the Egyptians. The lamb had been the way in which God had rescued his people by ensuring that the Egyptians couldn't wait to be rid of them when death swept through their midst. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the rescuer of the people – the lamb who ensures life when death is all around us.

So, it is no surprise at all that the two disciples left the side of John to follow the one he was announcing. The Messiah, the rescuer of the people, had just been pointed out to them and they weren't taking any chances on missing out on the rescue. As they follow Jesus, he turns and sees them. "What are you seeking?" he asks them. What are you seeking? It's the very first thing Jesus says to each of us as we enter his presence. What are you seeking? Do we know what we seek? What we desire? What we long for as we approach God? Perhaps it's so complicated, and deep, and so very difficult to put into words that we simply say, "Teacher, where are you staying?"

That seems an odd response to Jesus' question, doesn't it? He asks us a question and we answer with a question. We haven't told him what we're seeking...Or have we? That one word – teacher – tells Jesus the answer to his question. Teacher, they say. It is a term of respect, of acknowledgement that Jesus knows a lot about their Hebrew scriptures and about God and they want to learn from him. They follow up the title of "teacher" with their question, "where are you staying?" To

us, this may sound like they're asking him what hotel he's staying at for the few days he's in town but the Greek word they use has a much greater sense of remaining and enduring than does our English translation of the question. Where are you staying – where are you abiding? It is the same word John has used to describe the Holy Spirit remaining on Jesus after his baptism. It is the same word Jesus uses when, later in John's Gospel, he says to us, "Abide in me as I abide in you" as he is explaining that he is the vine and we are the branches attached to the vine. It's a rather long-term commitment to be the branches attached to a vine (John 15:4-5). Where are you staying is a much deeper question, then, than it first appears. Where can we go to be with you, to stay with you, to receive what you have to offer, to be in the very presence of God always?

What are you seeking? Where are you staying? One theologian, David F. Ford, proposes that the rest of John's Gospel is an exploration and response to these questions (David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021], 44). Jesus asks us what we seek, what we desire, and we say to him that we want to be with him, learn from him. This is, in a nutshell, what it is to be a disciple of Jesus. Harold Percy, in his book called *Your Church Can Thrive* writes, "Disciples are learners. As disciples of Jesus we are called to the lifelong adventure of learning to follow him closely and faithfully. In learning to live to the glory of God, our desire is to become more like Jesus in thought, character, attitude, behaviour, and purpose; to live lives that are pleasing to him in every way. We want to be able to share more fully, more confidently, more joyfully, more enthusiastically, and more passionately in the mission of Jesus". Did you hear all of those words that describe how we are to be? Confident. Joyful. Enthusiastic. Passionate. "We want to live in such a way that our words and

deeds bear witness to the reality of God's reign. As disciples of Jesus, our goal is to learn to live in such a way that our lives speak well of God and of his grace in Jesus Christ. We want to represent God well in all the places where we live our lives. We want our *lives* to attract people to God and to reflect God's desires for the world he created." *This* is what grew the early church in leaps and bounds. They lived lives that attracted people to God. God calls us to live the kingdom life in order to attract more people into the kingdom life with us. It is the point of all that we do and all that we desire to become (p.26 of *Your Church Can Thrive*).

God has called the Church into existence for the fulfillment of his purpose – to gather all people to him to be the one family of God throughout the world, to establish the rightness of the three-way relationship between God, people, and planet. How do we do that? That's a big task and so it's a big answer. But, let's take the part of the answer that is given to us today in this Gospel story. We testify.

John is our first example of testifying and his style likely seems out of the comfort zone of most people sitting here. He testifies loudly, boldly, bluntly, with whoever is in earshot. He's sharing knowledge about Jesus that God has provided. But also, he's sharing a personal experience he's had and that is most definitely not beyond the ability of any of us. Testifying is basically what I do each week when I stand here. I point to Jesus and I help you to deepen your knowledge and understanding and love of God through exploring the scriptures, to inspire you and to challenge you, to bring you closer to God and more fully into life in God's kingdom.

Andrew also testifies in this story. Before he accepts the invitation to go to the place where Jesus is staying, he first goes to his brother and excitedly tells him

that they've found the Messiah. We don't know that he said anything more than that. It seems like Andrew was just so excited that he had to share the news with someone close to him and that, too, is something that each one of us is capable of doing. Sharing positive church experiences with friends and loved ones is one of the most common ways of inviting others into the joy that we share in God's kingdom together.

And then we have Jesus. He does some pretty bold testifying throughout the Gospels. He is very passionate about the message he wants to share with us. It is amazing news, after all. God's kingdom is here. Turn your life around and enter into it, he says. However, that's not what we hear him do today. "Come and see" is the gentle and welcoming invitation we hear from him today. You're curious. You're searching. You know that your life needs something more. Come and see. It's an invitation to learn more on your terms. Just come and see...no pressure...

The gospel – the "good news" – proclaims important news but it is always an invitation. The good news "is the story of how God has acted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to rescue us from [the brokenness of the world and from our own brokenness.] It is the good news of how, in Jesus, God's kingdom has come among us. *We* are invited to turn from our preoccupations and priorities in order to enter the kingdom of God and begin learning how to live a new life with an entirely new focus and perspective (Mark 1:14-15) (Percy, p.18). Those words we hear Jesus speak today – "What are you seeking?" and "Come and see" – those are his very first words in this Gospel. This is the Gospel writer's way of sending us an important message: Jesus knows the world is searching for fulfillment and he invites them to find it in him. Come and see.

John tells us that his whole purpose in writing his Gospel is so that we can encounter Jesus in the stories we find there and believe and, in believing, have life in his name. We are now the way in which others will encounter Jesus and come to believe. This is the reason for the church's existence – to be an instrument for God toward his purpose of reconciliation.

Harold Percy wisely points out that “our goal is...to offer a new life in Christ – the life of the kingdom, which is really the goal of all [people's] striving and [our] heart's true home. The church is the community that is formed by kingdom people who together are celebrating this new life and learning how to live it” (p.20). “The true measure of congregational strength and vitality is how many people are being sent out – week by week – inspired, committed, and equipped to live to the glory of God and to do the work of the kingdom wherever their lives take them” (p.28). This is the rhythm of our worship together – we gather, we praise and pray and learn and then we are sent out to be God's ambassadors for reconciliation in the world. In other words, we are transformed and then we are sent to transform the world. As Jesus says later in John's Gospel. As the Father sent me, so now I send you. “What are you seeking?...Come and see.”