

A Sermon for the
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
January 16, 2010
Texts: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind -- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you -- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 1:1-5

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ And John testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptized with the Holy Spirit. And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.’ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘Where are you staying?’ He said, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).” John 1:29-42

What are you looking for? That is the question of the day. In all of the gospels about Jesus, the first words he utters are filled with special significance. First, for the particular story that gospel writer is telling. The first words seem to summarize the intention of the story, describe the purpose of the story. But then, beyond the literary context of the story, those words

also tend to carry deeper significance for the story's message for us and for our lives in the present.

The Gospel of John is uniquely different from the other gospels in both literary and theological development. John's use of symbolism, and of double, or even triple, entendre, reveals a much deeper literary skill. Then there is the obviously more highly developed theology concerning Jesus on display in John. It is in John that Jesus is presented as the Word of God incarnate, who existed with God from the beginning, who participated in the creation of the world. The Word that eventually was born in human flesh and lived among us, who was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Son of God, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the True Vine, and on and on.

And so it is in John that we have this unique telling of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John the Baptist shares with us the moment when he discovered who Jesus was. When this man came and was baptized by him and John saw the heavens open, the Spirit descend on him like a dove, and remain there. That was the sign God had told him would indicate to him who is the One who was coming, the Lamb, the Son of God, the Messiah. This, it turns out, was Jesus. And so, some days later, John is standing around with some of his disciples, when Jesus walks by, and John points at him. That is who John was, the pointer, the one who points to the Messiah. In so much art depicting John the Baptist he is standing with his hand out, pointing, at Jesus. He tells his disciples, "Look, there he goes, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Son of God."

As Jesus walks on by, two of John's disciples peel off and start to follow him. After walking for awhile, Jesus begins to sense that he is being followed. That's when he turns and asks the fateful question. He turns and looks the two men in the eyes and says, "What are you looking for?" Now, I've thought about what I might have said to two guys who were following me, like "Why are you following me?," or "You looking for me?," or "Hold it right there, what do you want?" All of which may be suitable paraphrases of what Jesus asked. But I didn't have a particular literary theme in mind like the gospel writer did, who purposefully wrote "What are you *looking* for? Because perhaps the central organizing theme of John's gospel is looking, seeing, and believing. John is telling stories about Jesus that open our eyes to who he is, shed light on him, enable us to see and believe.

Upon being stopped and questioned by Jesus, "What are you looking for?" The two followers asked in response, "Where are you staying?" Which seems a strange response, like they want to know his address. But that question, for John the gospel writer, has a deeper, more significant meaning. Yes, it could mean "where is your residence?" But one of the other recurring themes in John's gospel is the idea of abiding. When Jesus speaks of himself as the true vine and we are the branches. We are to abide in him, and he in us, so that God's love and joy would be fruitful in us. The greek word used for abide and staying are the same word. So their odd question, "Where are you staying?," has a double meaning -- what is your address, but more importantly, where do you abide? The answer being, with God.

Jesus responds with an answer directly in line with his original question, "Come and see." Again, that answer could mean "come see my house." But as you might expect, John intends a deeper meaning, come -- follow me -- and *see* - have your eyes opened to what God is doing through me. Come, see, and believe.

But the question of day remains. It truly is an abiding question. What are you looking for? A question that is asked of us every time we step through the doors of the church for worship. What did you come looking for when you came here. What are you looking for today? A few years ago a book came out written by John Dear. No, not the tractor guy - this one spells his name D-E-A-R. He is a priest, retreat leader, and author. He noticed as he studied the gospels how many questions Jesus asks. So he decided to write a study of Jesus and his message through the questions he asks in the gospels. He found that Jesus asked 307 questions in the four gospels. He put together a book of meditations on those questions, "The Questions of Jesus: Challenging Ourselves to Discover Life's Great Answers." The opening question, the first one in the book, you guessed it, "What are you looking for?"

On this first question, he writes, "Jesus does not address our sins, failures, or infidelity. He is not accusatory or hostile. Rather, he asks a question rooted in compassion and love, calling upon our deepest desires, the best within us. It is a question full of hope. A good place, he suggests, to begin our daily meditation is to sit in silent peace with the holy desires within us, and to imagine Jesus looking at us with loving kindness and asking, "What are you looking for?" What would we say? As we look at him, as we feel his sincerity and love, we notice his lack of judgment or anger. We know that the best within us comes from God, that God has given us everything that is holy within us, and that he will affirm whatever holy desires we seek. What is it we want and truly desire? If we were to sit with the question for days, perhaps we would see that we are not looking for money, power, fame, or control. We are really looking for love, goodness, truth, peace, happiness, justice, mercy, and joy.

Those experienced in the spiritual life know that there is power in knowing our desires, what we truly want. If we can name the loving desires that lie within us, and tell Jesus what we are looking for, he will listen and invite us into a whole new life where those desires will be realized. He will show us where he abides...come and see. Amen