

Sermon: Let us Come and See

In our reading today of John's gospel, it takes us to the day after Jesus is baptized. John the Baptist sees Jesus walking down the road, and points out the Lamb of God to some of his own disciples.

It could have been a casual encounter. John might have said, "Oh, hey – here comes that guy I was telling you about earlier." And his followers might have glanced up long enough to see who John was talking about and gone right back to whatever it was they had been doing. It could have happened like that. But it didn't.

He 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 baptizes 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 to them, "Come and see."

See. Show. Share. This is the essence of our faith. So why do we find this so hard to do? Why are we so afraid of spreading the Good News to others?

Maybe part of our fear comes from the fact that we just don't see God at work in our lives, and we don't want to be exposed as frauds. And yet I am thinking that each of us here today, has had some encounter or experience with Jesus, or we wouldn't be here right now. Maybe not. Maybe you are still searching for that experience.

Think about it for a moment. How have you personally experienced Christ, or how have you seen God in action lately?

John saw Jesus, and openly declared: "Here comes the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the entire world!" That's quite a statement! But John had experienced something his disciples apparently had not, and he was eager to tell them about that experience. He wanted them to see it, too.

So, John told them what he had seen, the Spirit of God coming down from heaven like a dove and resting on Jesus. He said, "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." He saw the Spirit rest on Jesus with his own eyes, and he recognized that Jesus was the One he'd been waiting for, the One he'd been looking for.

We are in the season of Epiphany, when we remember how Jesus was revealed to the wise men who came from the east. But it's important to remember that the wise men saw the star because they had been looking for it. To see God among us, we must be looking for God at work in our lives.

When John's disciples went after Jesus, he asked them, "What are you looking for?" These are the first words Jesus speaks in John's gospel.

We heard the opening verse of John on Christmas Eve: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...” But that Word doesn’t utter a word until 38 verses later, and when he speaks, it’s this simple but profound question.

When Jesus asks Andrew and the other disciple, “What are you looking for?” it means a lot more than just, “Did you lose something? Can I help you find it?” Jesus is really asking, “What are you searching for in life? What is your soul’s deepest desire? What are you seeking with all your being?”

Jesus asks us the same question time and time again. What are we looking for? What do we seek? What are we hunting for, to satisfy our soul’s deep longing? He’s still asking. He still wants to know, because we are good at looking for all the wrong things, in all the wrong places.

When Jesus asks them, “what are you looking for?” the disciples of John don’t give him an elevator speech or a thoughtfully prepared mission statement. But they know what they are looking for. When they come face to face with Jesus, they suddenly realize that the thing they’ve been seeking is this man standing in front of them. They respond with a question of their own. “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

Again, this means more than, “what’s your current address?” They are really asking, “Teacher, what is it like to abide with you? Is there room for us in your life? Can we come live where you live? Will you teach us?”

Because what they are looking for is something they can devote their lives to. They are looking for someone who will teach them the things of God. We want to spend every possible moment in your presence. Where are you abiding, so we can come abide with you.

And Jesus invites them to “come and see.” He invites them immediately into his life.

He does this with the understanding that they may choose not to follow. Once they've seen his accommodations and had a taste of his teaching, they may not want to stay. But his invitation is open anyway. Come, and see.

When Jesus says, "what are you looking for?" he's asking if we are ready to be disciples. If we are looking for comfort, or security, or some assurance that we are right, we might be looking in the wrong direction. If we are looking for acceptance or affirmation from others that we are 'good people', we might not be ready to ask where Jesus lives.

But if we want to be with him day in and day out from this moment and for all eternity, if we recognize that following Jesus is the only way to know the fullness of God's love, then it just makes sense for us to want to spend every moment in Christ's presence.

We often talk about inviting Jesus into our hearts or making Jesus part of our lives. But what if we turn that around, and realize that Jesus is welcoming us into his life? Jesus invites us to come and see where he lives. He offers us the opportunity to become part of what he is doing.

His invitation is open, but it's up to us to follow, up to us to "come and see." We must decide if we can make that kind of deep commitment, if we can devote ourselves to that kind of close relationship. It means letting go of our own assumptions and expectations, and surrendering our whole being to God's desire and plan for us.

What are you seeking with all your being? What is your soul's deep longing? Are you ready to go be part of Jesus' life, so you can find what you seek? And once you've found Christ, then what?

It's not enough to just 'see' Jesus. He calls us to show him through our lives as he changes us. He calls us to share the good news that he changes us.

Notice that it doesn't take long for Andrew to go looking for his brother Simon to show him Jesus, to share with him what Andrew has experienced. And the instant Jesus meets Simon, he gives him a new name: Peter, or "Rock."

Jesus gives each of us a new name the moment we meet him, too. Think about the name given to us at our baptism. We are called "Beloved" and "Child of God." In 1 John 3:1 we are reminded of this new identity: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

But Christ gives us another name, a specific one, just as he renamed Simon to indicate what his new mission in life would be. Maybe your name is "servant" or "healer" or "prayer warrior" or "teacher." Maybe you have been named "reconciler" or "leader" or "cook" or "visitor of the sick and lonely." Whatever your new name is, it is an invitation to live into your new identity as a follower of Jesus in a particular way.

You see, following Jesus wherever he goes, living with him, is the only way you are ever going to find what you are seeking. Entering a life-long commitment to be part of Christ's life is the only way you will ever fulfill that deep longing inside you. It's a longing that you might not even be able to name. But it's there.

Jesus asks, "What are you looking for?" Are you looking for grace and forgiveness? Are you looking for abundant life? Are you looking for an abiding and deep connection with the God who created you just so he could love you?

Jesus isn't sitting around waiting for us to invite him into our lives. Instead, Jesus invites us into his life. With his "come and see" Jesus includes us in his Lamb of God work. Some people talk about how Jesus fills a God-sized hole in their lives. It's not about that. It's about filling the place you can claim in God's family by accepting Christ's invitation into his grace. Amen