

Community Presbyterian Church
Cedar City, Utah
Pastor John Guthrie

“What Are You Looking For?”
Isaiah 49.1-7, John 1.29-42

A husband and wife were sitting in their living room one evening. The husband was watching football in his undershirt, complete with can of beer and bag of pretzels, stocking feet propped up on the coffee table. During a commercial he looked over at his wife, who was intently studying single sheet of paper. “Honey, he said,” what are you reading?” “Our marriage license,” the wife replied. The husband was rather amazed. “But dear,” he said, “what are you looking for?” His wife replied, rather drily, “The expiration date.”

This morning I want to spend some time with you studying that question, the one that Jesus asks Andrew and his unnamed companion. “What are you looking for?”

Today’s reading from John, like last week’s reading from Matthew, recounts Jesus coming to his cousin, John the Baptist. The two accounts are more than a little different, however. In fact, it’s not even clear in John’s account that Jesus is ever baptized by his cousin. John tells those who are at the river that day that it has been revealed to him that that the one on whom he sees the Spirit descend like a dove is the one whom he has prophesied previously will baptize women and men with that same Spirit. And at some point, presumably fairly recently, John has seen exactly that: the Spirit descends and rests on a particular man, and that man is this same Jesus. He testifies in fact, to two unique titles for this Jesus: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and the Son of God.

So in John’s account there is no explicit baptism, but there is the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. John has been told in a vision or in some other way that this event will mark the promised Messiah which means simply “Anointed One.” John can’t contain his joy: The Lamb of God! The Son of God!

We are told on the following day that John is with two of his own disciples, Andrew and one whose name is never revealed. Once again John sees Jesus and gives the same description: “Look! Here is the Lamb of God!” Andrew and the other disciple follow Jesus for a way. Jesus turns to them and asks, “What are you looking for?” When they ask him where he is staying, he replies, “Come and see.” So they do, and spend nearly all day with Jesus.

Apparently after they leave him, Andrew rushes to his brother Simon and breathlessly tells him, “We have found the Messiah!” Then he brings Simon to Jesus, and Jesus gives him a new name: “You are to be called Cephas.”

The Hebrew is actually Kephias, which in Greek is Petros, which has become in English, Peter, all of which mean simply “Rock.” In John’s gospel Peter is given his new name on his first meeting with Jesus.

I am always a little amused by Andrew’s declaration to Peter, “We have found the Messiah!” Sometimes these days people describe themselves or others as having “found Jesus.” I know I have shared with you even recently the response of my Episcopal priest friend. “Oh! I didn’t know he was lost!”

The subtle implication there, of course, is that Jesus seeks us and finds us, like a shepherd after lost sheep. It may be correct to say in one sense, that a particular individual has found Jesus. But I am always reminded that we are never lost from God. That as we read in Psalm 139, if we ascend to heaven, God is there; if we try to hide in Sheol, the abode of the dead, God is there; if we move to the farthest reaches of the sea, God is there; if we try to hide in the darkness, the darkness is light to God. Andrew may have thought he found the Messiah, but I am pretty sure the Messiah was never lost.

I think the question that Jesus asks his new disciples is a very deep and critical question. It was for them, and it is for you and me, too. What are we looking for?

It would be pedestrian for me to relate once again for you the list of things that people pursue these days. And these days are no different than previous days, really. Generations before us and today and after us seek what they think will bring them security and happiness. We all know that more often than not they search for happiness in all the wrong places. People in general expect money or possessions or power or security or family or even health to bring them well-being and contentment. And they do, for awhile.

The so-called Wisdom Literature in the Bible has much to say about this path. I commend to you the Book of Proverbs, in which the counsel to the young men to whom the book is written is continuously against pursuit of things that do not satisfy, and instead the diligent search for wisdom and righteousness, especially as they are expressed in the Torah, the book of instructions.

C.S. Lewis had some words to say about this human tendency to settle for what we think we want rather than looking for higher and better things. He wrote this: “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”¹

I can imagine Jesus asking Andrew and his friend, “What are you looking for?” with a slight smile turning up the corners of his mouth. Because Jesus knew, while they almost certainly did not, that they had just now found what they were looking for. They had found that which gives life its meaning and purpose. They had found that which gives life its joy and passion. They had found that which gives life its hope and vigor. They had indeed found the Messiah, who was never lost. Andrew, at the end of the day, saw a glimpse of that truth. He ran to his brother, Peter, telling him the news.

He was only just beginning, however, to see what following this Messiah would mean. That would become clear only over the next three years or so, and even then it probably never became totally clear. Do any of us really know entirely and fully what it means to follow Jesus? I doubt it. Rather, we are called to follow, period. We learn as we go, but we never possess all knowledge. We just follow. And in that following is meaning and purpose and joy and passion.

Andrew and Peter and Philip and James and all of the other disciples learned a very difficult and agonizing lesson about discipleship at the end of that three years. They saw the man they knew as Messiah and Son of God nailed to a cross, where he died. They learned that to follow Jesus is to take up a cross.

A minister one Sunday surrounded himself at the church chancel with children for the Children’s Message. When asked whose birthday would be celebrated the next day, a few of the older children knew and responded, “Martin Luther King, Jr.” The minister inquired further by asking what kind of work King did. Some of the children knew: “He was the minister of a church.”

The preacher needed that fact in order to get to the point he wanted to make, but on the way he drew their attention to the fact that he was a minister, too. He asked the children, “Do you think a holiday could ever be named for me?” After long period of silence, one of the older children observed, “You have to die first.”

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 1949.

Jesus asks Andrew and his friends, “What are you looking for?” They had actually found it, but did not fully comprehend what it was they had found. That required a long period of sitting at the Rabbi’s feet.

Desmond Tutu has noted that coming to know Jesus is something like sitting in front of a fireplace on a cold winter day. If you want to experience the warmth of that fire deep down inside of you, you can’t just peek at the fire and walk past it and expect that that warmth is going to have an effect on you. No, if you want the warmth of that fire to radiate into you, you need to spend some time there. And it’s the same thing with Jesus. If we want Jesus to change and transform us, we have to set aside the time and we have to make the commitment.²

And here we often run into the next barrier to sold-out discipleship under Jesus. We are not sure we want to be transformed or renewed. We like ourselves just the way we are, thank you very much.

C.S Lewis once again: “Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right, and stopping the leaks in the room, and so on: you knew those jobs needed doing and you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably, and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”³

What are we looking for? Are we looking for a Jesus who will confirm our already existing biases and prejudices and ill-formed notions? Are we looking for a Jesus who will rubber-stamp our poorly-considered presumptions and convictions? We are out of luck. The Jesus we encounter in the gospels is a Jesus who is constantly and always turning our preconceptions upside down. And if we don’t find him constantly and always doing that, then we are not listening, and we are not following.

² Desmond Tutu, *God Has A Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* [New York: Doubleday, 2004], p. 100.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: William Collins, 1970), 172.

What we find instead is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And he does that by dying and returning to life. He is the sacrifice for our sins that sets us free, the sacrifice that we cannot make for ourselves. And he is what we are looking for. Even when we would rather not be changed by him. Even when the cost of discipleship seems too high. Even when we know that we will never be the same when we follow. Still: he is what we are looking for.

Saint Augustine of Hippo, who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries AD wrote these now famous words: "You have made us for yourself, so that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."⁴

We can seek and search and hunt, but in the end what we are looking for is this simple peasant from Nazareth in Galilee. He is more, of course, than just a wise prophet as some would make him to be. He is more than a gifted teacher who lived and died and now is no more. He is, as John testifies, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is, as John testifies, the Son of God. He is, as Andrew tells his brother, the Messiah, the Anointed One for whom his people have so long waited.

And he is not dead, but living and searching constantly and pervasively for each one of us. Seeking us out, calling us to follow a path whose end we cannot know and whose twists and turns we cannot anticipate. But that doesn't matter. We are simply to follow.

What are we looking for? We are looking for him.

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*.