

Hear now the word of the Lord from the Gospel of John, chapter 1:35-42.

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ He said to them, "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. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas"^[1] (which is translated Peter^[2])."

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.

Lord God,

Open our eyes, ears, and hearts to encounter your word so that we may truly understand, that understanding, we may believe, and believing, we may be brought to obedience and faithfulness through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

When faced with the question, "What are you looking for?" ...what comes to mind? Last week, the liturgical calendar marked the celebration that the Magi finally found what *they* were looking for – the Messiah, Jesus Christ, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

But throughout our own holiday season...what were we looking for? Time with family? Time to rest? Time in general? What are *you* looking for? Ways to start the year on a high note? New memories and achievements for this year?

What am *I* looking for? Well, every morning I am looking for anything from my glasses to my keys to my phone.

What are *we* *looking* for? It depends on who asks and the context, right? During the holiday season, that question can refer to shopping lists or family plans. Coming from society it could refer to the "latest and greatest". When asked by family, your spouse, your children, your parents, your friends, it could refer to relational expectations. But what about when this question comes from Jesus? What does it mean then?

John the Baptist was with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus walking by. He said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" This was John's job: to prepare the way for Jesus. And upon hearing his declaration, John's disciples began to follow Jesus. At this moment Jesus turned around and asked, "What are you looking for?" Jesus is asking them to explain *why* they are following him. To follow someone means to be their disciple – to be the student. And they replied, "Rabbi" confirming that they want to learn from him – they are identifying him as their designated teacher. But perhaps this question was too abrupt, or they didn't know themselves, because they answered his question with a question, "Where are you staying?" They don't know what they are getting themselves into, but they trust John and have heard about the one who is to come from John's teachings and their own understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps they

were confused about who Jesus is because he *wasn't* who they were looking for. According to the Hebrew Bible they are looking for a king – for the anointed one who will make Israel great and get rid of the Roman occupation. They are looking for a warrior, someone who would stand for them and against the empire. But who this Jesus is that John pointed to is a mystery to them. John's disciples didn't have an academic answer that summarized their theological understanding of what it means that Jesus is the Lamb of God. They did not provide their resumé of what they learned and endured following John. They simply asked a question. Praise be to God that we do not have to have all of the answers as we begin to follow Jesus Christ.

Jesus beautifully responds, "Come and you will see." He is inviting these two disciples, and all of us, to come and follow him – perhaps we will see and learn what it is we are looking for as we take the first step or the next step of discipleship. Maybe following Jesus isn't what we are initially looking for. But come and see. Come and see the one who came into the world out of God's great love for us. Come and see the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

Many of us in church are not new believers. If you, like me, have been going to church your whole life and have personally known Jesus most of your life, then these stories help you remember fondly when you first took your wary steps into discipleship. I want to encourage you that this story of new discipleship is not reserved only for those who have not personally met Christ yet. The question, "what are you looking for" is one that is asked of us each and every day no matter where we are in our discipleship journey.

When I was in middle school, I was in the midst of a challenging discussion with a teacher that left me feeling worthless. But in that moment, God touched my heart and I felt him say to me, "Melissa, I have created you for a purpose. You are to share my love with the world." In that moment I realized what I was looking for: I was looking for a relationship with Jesus. And since then, I have been pursuing Jesus and his church.

But that was one moment many years ago... friends, every day we are being asked, "what are you looking for?" This is a question for all disciples at all times. We must continue to prayerfully consider this question.

I have been in an intense season of trying to answer this question again. Through prayer, discernment, and the support of my family I have spent the last six months questioning, "what am I looking for?" or as the NIV translates this question, "What do I want?" When you surrender the parts of your life you thought you wanted and turn them to God, we can ask God the very same question: God, what am I looking for? What do I want? And through prayer, healing, and worship it became clear: Jesus reaffirmed that I want to serve him, I am looking to serve his church, I am looking for a church family to love.

In this season I read Psalm 63:

"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands."

When Jesus asks, “What are you looking for?” will we respond like the psalmist? Are we ready to say “You are the one I am looking for, you are all I want, you are all that I have, and you are all that I long for?” /

Jesus offers us a relationship with him – he invites us to know him, to see him, to abide with him.

Why are we in church? Why are we here? What are we looking for? We are here for Christ. I assure you – the answer, “YOU, oh Lord, I am looking for you” will never miss and it will always be enough. And even if we don’t fully understand what that means, Jesus is inviting us constantly to walk with him as his disciples and learn more and more about the one we are looking for.

Jesus asks a similar question at the end of John’s gospel. Three days after his death, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and found it was empty. She cried in the garden. She was distraught. She lost Jesus on Friday and here she is, losing him all over again on Sunday. But Jesus walks up to her and asks, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Whether we are at the beginning of our discipleship journey or have been on this journey most of our lives, whether we understand fully what is happening or what we can expect, we are invited to constantly seek Jesus.

We are in a liturgical season where we are standing between the nativity and the cross. We are standing between the question, “What are you looking for?” and “Who are you looking for?”. As we journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, from the nativity to the cross, from Christmas to Easter, let us posture our hearts and minds towards Christ. Let us keep this question on our heart so that we may constantly seek to answer with an emphatic, “You! We are looking for you, Jesus.”

After John’s disciples accepted Jesus’s invitation to “come”, they immediately invited others to join. Andrew went straight to his brother, Simon Peter. He said, ““We have found the Messiah”. And he brought him to Jesus.” He found what he was looking for and he had to share.

Growing up in California meant that in the fourth grade we learned all about California history. California’s history is a story of looking for something and finding it – what were they looking for? Gold. In 1849 the gold rush was booming and the search for gold was on. The California motto captures this history – it’s eureka. It means “I have found it!” We were taught in school that when you found gold you yelled, “Eureka!” The Greek word for “to find” is *εὕρισκω* – when Andrew found the one he was looking for, he yelled Eureka: I have found it. And what he found was far better than gold.

We have the opportunity every day to find Jesus and pursue him. And when we find him, let’s yell eureka and tell our brothers and sisters about the one we have found. May we be like the disciples and invite our brothers and sisters to join us in this discipleship journey – even if we

don't fully understand it and even if we are still articulating our answer to the question, "What or who are you looking for?" We aren't meant to walk the journey of discipleship alone.

Let us pray.

Lord God,

Who are we looking for? What do we want? Help us to set our hearts and minds on you: that we may accept your invitation to "come and see" and proudly proclaim that you are the one we are looking for. You, God, are all that we want, all that we long for, all we desire. Renew our hearts. Set us on your path. Help us to shout out eureka and proclaim the Gospel to our brothers and sisters. Help us to turn towards you. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.