

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 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.” 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).”

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I have a dear friend who is a former Dominican, and is now an Episcopal priest and professor of religion at Pacific Lutheran University. At some point each new academic year, one of his first-year students will inevitably ask him some version of the same question: “Have you accepted Jesus as your personal savior?”

And his answer is just as consistent. He tells the student that he won’t answer the question, not because he doesn’t know the answer; not because he is embarrassed or coy about his answer. He won’t answer the question because it isn’t big enough.

A “big enough” question is one that takes time – maybe a life-time – and focused contemplation to respond. And when disciples of John the Baptizer came looking for him, Jesus asked them an *enormous* question: “What are you looking for?”

Now, as large as the question sounds, the original Greek does provide some boundaries. This is a question about philosophical investigation; a question about looking for something worth finding or saving. This is a question anticipating a search for God’s heaven or for righteousness or justice.

We could ask the question in English by asking: “What’s the point of your existence? What do you hold to be of ultimate concern?” Or how

about: “To what would give yourself completely if you were to find it? To *what* would give yourself *completely* if you were to find it?”

*That’s* a “big-enough” question!

A question that is big enough asks so much of us that one or two words are completely insufficient. A truthful response may change from day to day. Genuine responses are multilayered and complex, and depending on the depth of each person’s self-examination, if they are truly honest, responses to the question shift and develop, always aware of some remaining mystery.

John the Baptizer must have been an effective spiritual teacher. Because when Jesus asks John’s followers “What do you seek?” they respond by asking Jesus another huge question: “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

Again, our English translation is a bit pale. They *do* want to know where Jesus is bunking that night. They want to know, that is, where they can come and simply be with him. More to the point, they are also asking where Jesus is abiding, where he is remaining.

And deeper still, they are asking about what grounds Jesus, what motivates and energizes this teacher. As a community of practitioners, like this congregation, they are curious about who Jesus understands himself to be and why John has seen Jesus as the Lamb of God.

In turn, Jesus invites them into his earthly home-base, into his spirit and into his awareness. “Come and see.” On the surface, his invitation appears to be simple: “Come and see.” It’s non-threatening. It’s clear. It’s also inherently relational. They see where he is staying, accept his invitation and remain with him.

Not only do they enter his temporary, physical home, they enter into his spiritual revelation and take it into the depths of their being. Having encountered that which they hold to be of ultimate concern, they give themselves to it completely.

They abide where Jesus abides.

The Gospel writer tells us that the encounter happened at about four o’clock or about the tenth hour by Jewish reckoning of time. That was not a random factoid. The tenth hour was the time set for temple worship. The signal is that Jesus, the Lamb of God, has replaced the need for animal sacrifice as a way to unite people to God.

Next, some of those who have seen the theological truth that John the Baptizer saw went out to live into their new understanding. Andrew brings his brother, Simon, to Jesus who looks into the depths of Simon's essence, a part of Simon that others can't see, and renames him Peter, the Rock, to reflect what is most true and real at Peter's core.

"What are you looking for?"

It's a huge question that each of us must engage for ourselves, although we face it alone at our peril. If we are to avoid becoming self-obsessed, we absolutely require the support and guidance and challenges of a community of the adequate; a group of people who are living into their response to the question.

"Come and see."

Christ, the Anointed, abides here in this place, and in the hearts and minds of people who have encountered that which they hold to be of ultimate concern and have given themselves to it.

In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus' earthly ministry and mission in start with a question: "What are you looking for?" followed by an invitation: "Come and see." And that's still the pattern for the most effective evangelism we can muster.

Episcopalians are right to shy away from evangelism that is judgmental or unwelcome. People around us are better served when we avoid posing questions that are too small. Instead, we can be curious about what people are looking for and offer invitations into relationship with other people seeking something real; something nourishing.

"What are you looking for?" "Come and see."

The purpose, after all, isn't to get more bodies in pews or to reverse declining membership in the church, as wonderful as both those results would be. Our purpose is to restore people to unity with God and each other. And we do that by inviting people to embrace and encounter that which matters most to them, so that they can learn to engage the joy, the abundance and the mystery of life experienced in Christ.

Even better, it is *still Christ* making the invitation; it is Christ at work in another person's life. Even when we struggle to describe our faith, or feel the impulse to defend or justify our trust in God. Even, maybe especially, when we are riddled with doubt and confusion, and not really sure we believe at all.

Here in this house, we gather in solidarity, not uniformity. We gather “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” as St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “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.”

And because it is God taking the initiative in the Kosmos, this intrepid little community of the adequate has everything we need. We are not lacking any spiritual gift: faith, hope, love, curiosity and open hearts as well as an impressive variety of life experiences.

God’s grace transforms lives and plants hope; God’s grace inspires *shalom* and bridges our differences of perspective. Christ will strengthen us for the work that is God’s to do through us. Our is to trust Christ at our own center and in the midst of this community and beyond all human comprehension.

In Christ, we are free and encouraged to live deeper into our own big questions; to respond more fully to the God we seek, because, as Paul promised, “God is faithful.” And the more completely we give ourselves to Christ, the more people are drawn to come and see how we respond to their questions.

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