

## Hello — “What Are You Looking For?”

My Sermon on John 1:29-42 ( by James Laurence - Pastor of [First Lutheran Church of Albemarle](#).)

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?”

[John 1:38](#)

In today’s gospel reading ([John 1:29-42](#)), we encounter the very first words of Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel. Words, we know, are important to God. It is how our world was created. God spoke and said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. So, what would God’s Son say? What would be his first recorded words? His last? Words matter to God. So it is worth paying close attention to what God’s Son has to say. Jesus makes just three short statements in today’s gospel reading, and so I thought I would use these three statements to form my sermon today.

### **What Are You Looking For?**

The first statement that Jesus makes in John’s gospel is found in verse 38, and it is actually a question. John the Baptist had just pointed Jesus out to two of his disciples, saying, “*Look, here is the Lamb of God!*” These two disciples of John quickly made the decision to follow Jesus. When Jesus saw them following, he turned to them and asked: “*What are you looking for?*” Now, when you think about it, there are a lot of things that Jesus might have said to them, just as there are lots of ways to greet people these days. “Hello,” for example. Or, “how are you?” “How’s it going?” Maybe even something like, “Can I help you?” “Do you need something?”

But Jesus says to these two disciples, “What are you looking for?” And I think that this is more than simply a generic greeting. It is a simple question, but profound. Maybe even life-changing. The Son of God looks at his first would-be followers, and asks them to consider what it is that they are really looking for. It is, when you stop and think about it, one of the most important questions that we can ever ask ourselves. And it is, I believe, the question that Jesus asks of all his would-be followers. What are you looking for?

We often don’t stop and ask ourselves this question. We rush through life, meeting the day’s needs, dealing with the thousand things this world throws at us, and rarely slow down enough to consider this question. And when we don’t stop and ask ourselves this question, we run the risk of being like the man who spent his whole life climbing the proverbial ladder, only to discover that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. What are we looking for? Is our ladder on the right wall?

It brings to mind for me a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, “[The Remains of the Day](#),” that was also made into a movie. It is told from the perspective of a butler who is looking back at his life. He has devoted his life to his role as a butler in England, and particularly to his employer, Lord Darlington, whom he trusted completely and is now wondering if that was the right decision. He is reflecting on his life as he goes on a long drive to visit a former housekeeper, who married and moved away. He finally takes the time to consider his life, and ask if he has spent it looking for the right things. His life, he comes to realize, could have been different. He realizes that slowly, almost painstakingly, as the story unfolds.

The title, “The Remains of the Day,” suggests that it is perhaps not too late. The day is not over. There is time remaining. His life is not completed. And that’s true for us all. But when will we

stop, and reflect on our life? If not today, when? When we will ask ourselves, what are we looking for? To all who would follow Jesus, to all who are searching for answers, and to all who believe that they can be found in Jesus, Jesus asks this simple but profound question. What are you looking for?

When Jesus first asked this question to those would-be followers, he wanted to make sure that they were following Jesus for the right reasons. What were they really looking for? Were they looking for a military commander who would lead them out of the oppression they were experiencing from Rome? Were they looking for a teacher of the Scriptures who would help them understand exactly what they had to do to earn righteousness in God's eyes? Were they looking for a miracle-worker who would heal them of their sickness? Jesus did not come to offer these things.

John the Baptist knew what Jesus came to give us. When he saw Jesus, he said: "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) If this is what those disciples were looking for, then they have found it in Jesus. If they are looking for anything else, then they will only end up disappointed.

But, of course, the question for us is not just what were those first disciples looking for, but what are we looking for? What are we really hoping to get out of life? What gets us out of bed in the morning? What keeps us awake at night? When it comes right down to it, what are we really looking for? And, more specifically, what are we hoping to find in Jesus? If we are looking for anything other than the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, then Jesus will only be another in a long line of disappointments. On the other hand, if this is exactly what we are looking for, then the very next words that Jesus speaks in John's Gospel offer a wonderful invitation to us all: "*Come and see.*" The second statement that Jesus makes in John's Gospel.

### **Come and See**

The disciples answer Jesus' first question with a question of their own: "*Rabbi, where are you staying?*" Okay. They want to follow Jesus. So it would be good to know where he is staying. On the other hand, their response doesn't go very deep. It's on the surface. And Jesus probably realizes that this is going to take some time. So, he simply invites them to "come and see." And this second statement that Jesus makes is another simple, but profound statement, isn't it? Come and see. Come and see where he is staying. And where he is going. And what he is saying. And what he is doing. Come and join Jesus for the great adventure of the Christian life. Isn't that the invitation to us all? Come and see. Not that we will see it all, not right away. And we will still have questions. So many questions. Faith doesn't take away the mystery of life. It opens our eyes to the mystery of life. The great mystery and wonder of this world created by God, and visited and redeemed by God's Son. Come and see. Following Jesus begins us on a journey, a journey of having our eyes opened to the grace and mercy and love that is always right there, right here, right in front of us, hiding in plain sight. Come and see.

Think of what those first disciples would see. The miracles. The crowds. The teachings. The controversies. The suffering and death on the cross. The empty tomb. The resurrection. Jesus, showing them his hands and his side, his wounds, inviting them to come and see again, and

believe. And think, too, of Jesus' famous words to Thomas, who would not believe that Jesus was raised until he saw for himself: *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*

That's us, of course. We haven't seen, and yet we have come to believe. And how blessed we are. Because now we see everything differently. It is as C.S. Lewis famously put it, *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."* It is by our faith that we see everything else. Just as it was for those first followers of Jesus.

### **You Are to Be Called Cephas ... Peter**

Okay. Jesus asks us what we are looking for. He invites us to come and see. And then he makes one more statement in this gospel reading. It is to Peter, but just as with the other statements, it applies to us all. Jesus looked at Peter, who would become the leader of his disciples and of the early church. Simon is his birth name. But Jesus renames him Cephas, the Aramaic word for rock. (The Greek word for rock is petros, or Peter.)

Jesus gives Simon a new name, a new identity. A simple thing, you might say. We've all been given nicknames. Some of them we like, some we don't. But this is not just a nickname. It is a new name. A new identity. Everything will now be different in Simon's life. Even his name. He will now be Peter, the rock on which Jesus would build his church.

Names are important. And we join this church that Jesus built, we are given a new name, too: Christian. This is now our identity. We are Christians, followers of Jesus. We know what we are looking for, and we have made the life-changing decision to follow Jesus, to come and see the world with new eyes. And behold, everything is new.

### **Closing**

At the very end of a famous work about Jesus by Albert Schweitzer, a renowned Lutheran and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, he concludes with these words about Jesus:

*"He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words, 'Follow thou me!', and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."*

Yes. To all who follow him, he will reveal himself. We will learn who he is. Come and see. Be made new again. Find what it is that we are looking for. And then, of course, go – live this new, changed life. With the ladder on the right wall. With our eyes open to the wonder of this world, and to the gift of faith – of believing that we have been called by none other than the very Son of God, and that we have, indeed, found what we are looking for: The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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