

SECOND READING: John 1:29-39a

29 The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 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.’ 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” 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.”

This is the Word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO God

FIRST READING: Isaiah 49:1-7

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. 2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. 3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." 4 But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God." 5 And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— 6 he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." 7 Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

“Come & See”

“*What are you looking for?*”, “*What are you looking for?*”¹ These are the very first words Jesus speaks in the gospel according to John. I understand that if you type these words into Google, the first most common search beginning with them is “*What are you looking for in a relationship?...with answers like love, security, contentedness?*” Then there’s “*What are you looking for in a job?... success, knowledge, competence, wealth, power?*” Then there’s “*What are you looking for at this point in your life...a house, college, children, retirement, peace?*” I hate to admit it, but I ask this question, “*What are you looking for?*” a lot these days, but it’s usually of myself when I can’t find my keys or my purse or remember what it is that has brought me to the store that I’m now standing in. Ahh. But regardless, this is usually a very important question. When Jesus asks, “*Why are you looking for “ or maybe more true to the Greek, “What are you seeking”* of Andrew and the other disciple, he is asking “*What do you need? What is your soul’s deepest desire?, “Where do you find meaning?”, What makes your heart sing?*”

And the disciples’ answer? Well, they don’t answer Jesus’ question... or do they?² “*Rabbi, where are you staying?*” the disciples reply. With this, they are first saying that they are choosing Jesus. They are choosing Jesus as teacher, as someone who is wise and worth learning from, as a trustworthy conversation partner. “*Rabbi*” means teacher. But they are also saying that they want to be with him. They say, “*Rabbi, where are you staying?*” *Where are YOU staying?*” They are not asking him for the location of his tent or the address of the guest house at which he is visiting. No, they want to know about his enduring, permanent, dwelling place. For they use the Greek verb *meno*, meaning “to abide, to remain, to dwell”. It is the same word Jesus later uses when he speaks of the vine and the branches... “*Whosoever, abides in me will bear much fruit,*” and when he says, “*Abide in me as I abide in you.*” So, while the disciples likely don’t know the fullness of what they say, they answer Jesus’ question by

¹ Audrey West. “*Second Sunday after Epiphany*” <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-john-129-42-3> (accessed 1-14-23).

² Carla Pratt Keyes. Sermon: “*What are you looking for? . . . Come and see.*” John 1:29-42. <https://asermonforeverysunday.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Carla-Pratt-Keyes-2nd-Sunday-after-the-Epiphany-1-15-2023.pdf>. (accessed 1-12-23).

indicating that they are looking for something divinely meaningful in their lives and that they choose to be WITH him to find it.³

I think it interesting that these seekers, these men are disciples of John the Baptist, and John has already addressed the question and seems to know exactly what he is seeking. He is seeking or pointing everyone to Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Son of God.⁴ Actually, in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist is more accurately identified as not the Baptist but the Witness, for his sole purpose and role is to give evidence on behalf of the One who sent him, always pointing toward the Christ. He had been told that he would find the Messiah by baptizing...the Spirit would descend and remain on him. All his life John has known that he would know it when the right one arrived.

One commentator imagines John standing there, waist-deep in the river, looking into each person's eyes just before he baptizes, searching for some glimmer of divinity and then, when they come up out of the water, looking toward heaven to see if this will be the one on whom the Spirit descends and remains. He imagines it being for John somewhat like panning for gold. John would each day scoop up a pan full of sand and gravel from the bottom of the creek and swirl it around hoping that the sand and gravel would slosh out and he'd maybe see some flecks of gold in his pan. But what he actually gets is a nugget the size of a bowling ball. He struggles to get it out of the water, gasping and shouting, "*this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" "*I saw it with my own eyes! I saw the Spirit descend and remain on him. I'm telling you, this is the Messiah, the Son of God.*"⁵ Yes, John the Baptist knew what he was looking for and he knew when he'd found it, but the disciples, maybe not quite yet, although they seemed to have a hunch that IN this man, Jesus, they'd find it.

Malcolm Gladwell is a bestselling author from Canada, a journalist, public speaker, and instructor. He is best known for his nonfiction theoretical writing on psychology and sociology. He grew up in a Mennonite family, a very faithful and devoted family, but as he pursued his

³ Audrey West.

⁴ Jillian Engelhardt. "Second Sunday after Epiphany." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-john-129-42-6> (accessed 1-13-23)

⁵ Jim Somerville. "Have You Found It?" <https://asermonforeverysunday.com/sermons/a08-the-second-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-2020/> (accessed 1-13-23).

career, he drifted away from his faith and stopped thinking much about Jesus. Then, he started work on a book, which he intended from the outset to be a bit different from his usual high-minded ones, one which looked at individuals and the choices they make. Among the many people that Gladwell interviewed in researching the book were the Christians of Le Chambon, who risked their lives to shelter Jews during WWII but also a Mennonite couple whose faith was evident in their response to the murder of their teenaged daughter. Both the mother and the father of the girl spoke early on, not only about their heartbrokenness and anger, but about the path of forgiveness. In fact, at a press conference, after their daughter's body was found the father said, "We would like to know who the person or persons are who murdered her so we could share, hopefully, a love that must be missing in their lives."

Gladwell was more than surprised and wondered, "How could he say that? Where did that come from? Where did this man find the inner courage and strength?" It soon began to dawn on Gladwell that HE was personally missing something. He was missing the inexplicable power that comes from within, the weapons of the Spirit that were so apparent in these people." He was upset, felt vulnerable, lost. But then he realized that he could have it. He could have this powerful, beautiful something. He could have always had it, and he realized how much he really wanted it.⁶

Malcolm Gladwell and the disciples were looking for something. And thank goodness, they realized it. Like so many people who are thirsting and hungering, not quite sure how they got to where they are or what it is that they need to have to go forward, they were seeking. And Jesus' response to them is perfect....it is perfect. It is perfect for all seekers of all time. He says, "Come and See"! Come and see. We often speak of how Jesus has come to be with us, but here we see that Jesus invites us to be with him too, to walk the path a while with him, to study the world with him and consider our place in it. "Consider your place in me," he says. "See if it is not what makes your heart sing." "Come and see."

⁶ http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/books/how-i-rediscovered-faith?fb_action_ids=1015121223109133&fb_action_types=ot.recommends&fb_source=source=other_multiline&action_object_map=%5B565994416815996%5D%action_type_map=%5B%22og.recommends%22%5D%action_ref_map=map=%5B%5D and http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/author-malcolm-gladwell-finds-his-faith-again/2013/10/11/d633d814-3266-11e3-89ae-16e186e117d8_story.html.

Rev. Jim Somerville tells of when he was a youth minister. He wanted to have the biggest and best youth group in town. One of the things he did was to weigh every kid who came on Wednesday nights because it sounded so cool to say that he had a 1,136 lb youth group rather than a group of 11 kids. He said he did everything he could to increase attendance; he started a radio station, held the “World’s Biggest Kite Contest,” and made regular trips to the amusement park. But he remembers sadly the day things changed for him, when he called to invite one of the youth to something that they were doing and the youth said, “no thanks, I have a friend over and we’re going to a movie.” Somerville says that it hit him then that he could never compete. The kids had all the entertainment that they needed and a whole lot more. The only thing that he could give them that they weren’t getting somewhere else was...Jesus. So, he made up his mind to do that...to give them Jesus...and to keep it up even if the youth group withered away to less than a thousand pounds.⁷ He is still doing that as he pastors Richmond’s First Baptist Church.

Friends, siblings in Christ, you may be here this morning, at the beginning of your walk, unsure of where you are going, tentative or you may also be here today, already on the path, looking for something more. Wherever you are, the question that Jesus asks, “*What are you seeking*” is for us all, and it is a question worth wrestling with since our answers will have a great deal to do with what we find as well as with the steps we take to get there. Regardless, if we let go of our own lives and surrender our beings to his desire and plan, we will hear Jesus’ invitation, the same for all of us, to come into his life, forgiven, free of guilt, shame and fear, full...to the brim full... of joy and purpose and peace, his invitation to be part of what he is doing in the world. He will invite us to know the fullness of his love, for us and for the world, and to abide in him now and for all eternity. We will be invited to find what makes our hearts sing. Let then....let’s then... “*Come and See*”.

Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lamb of God, you call us to consider indeed what it is that we are looking for and then you invite us into your life. Help us to accept your invitation

⁷ Jim Somerville.

without reservation, that we may indeed be pure in our desire of you, that we may then be with you, learn from you, abide in you.. see the world as you do and serve in it as your representatives. Help us to completely relinquish ourselves to your love and ultimately, claim our place in your kingdom. In the name of the way, the truth and life...in the name of the word made flesh...in the name of the light of the world, even Jesus Christ, Amen.