

John 1: 29-42 "What Are You Looking For?" Rev. Janet Chapman 1/19/20

Some of you may remember the old Sesame Street game that had four squares and a jingle that went something like, "Which one of these is not like the other, which one just doesn't belong?" If we played that game with the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John, John's Gospel would certainly be the one with the lights blinking around it at the end. John records no birth story but has 2 temple-cleansing stories. He records no parables and identifies Jesus' miracles as "signs." He quite often relates not simply what Jesus did or taught, but also why or for what reason he did such things. When compared with the other 3 Gospels, John paints a more divine portrait of Jesus, seemingly not wanting his readers to forget or miss the fact that this earthly Jesus is God's Son who existed before all time. As opposed to Matthew, where John the Baptist already knows Jesus before his baptism, our Gospel today depicts John the Baptist as waiting for that sign of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Anointed One. He didn't know Jesus was the One until the point of Jesus' baptism when a voice tells John this is the guy. Prior to that, it was like John had been panning for gold with each baptism, sifting through the waters searching for that gold nugget that would be revealed as the Savior. Eugene Peterson translates John's first sight of Jesus after his baptism: "Here he is; God's Passover Lamb! He forgives the sins of the world! This is the man I've been talking about, 'the One who comes after me but is really ahead of me.' I knew nothing about who he was – only this: that my task has been to get Israel ready to recognize him as the God-Revealer. That is why I came here baptizing with water, giving you a good bath and scrubbing sins from your life so you can get a fresh start with God...The One who authorized me to baptize with water told me, 'The One on whom you see the Spirit come down and stay, this One will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' That's what I saw happen, no question about it, 'This is the Son of God.'"

Two of John's disciples are naturally curious, so the next time Jesus comes around, they start following him. Jesus turns and the first words out of his mouth in this Gospel are "What are you looking for?" The question catches them so off guard, they aren't exactly sure how to respond. We now know this Gospel well enough to know such a question might have multiple levels in which to delve. "What are you looking for?" Jesus asks. As you sit here in this place at this time, what are you looking for? What are any of us looking for in worship? Why do we come to church? A 5 year old girl was sitting in a wedding with her grandmother. She had been to Sunday School but never been in a traditional worship service. During the wedding, the minister said, "Let us pray" and everyone bowed their heads in prayer. The little girl looked around and saw all the heads bowed and eyes turned to the floor and she belted out, "Grandma, what are they looking for?" What are we looking for here? Some of us come because our parents didn't give us a choice growing up. We still carry that voice lodged in our minds and can't get rid of it. Some of us go because it's easier to go than to argue with our spouse about it. Most of us probably don't go with great expectations – our reasons are mixed at best, but maybe we are interested in how we could live better lives, up to a point.

What are you looking for? Deep in our souls, there are those of us looking for something to believe in and hold on to, something important enough to live for, and something big enough to claim our passions. 2020 has brought with it as much apprehension as celebration including impeachment hearings, tensions with Iran, forest fires in Australia, incivility from the highest places, and the fringes of a presidential election taking shape. Most of us are looking for something more, something better, than what our leaders can promise us. Even climate deniers know that earth hangs in the balance and that even if fears of global

climate change are exaggerated, nevertheless, we are on the edge of a precipice as a planet and as a nation that can't be ignored. As our friend Bruce Epperly notes, our values bring life and death to this planet, and at some point, our foolish ways may lead to a point of no return in terms of planetary and national health. But we can't allow messages of doom to disempower us. Nor can we let our institutional waywardness, personal insecurities, and community imperfections disqualify us from making a difference. The truth still remains today that the best kept secret in America is that people would rather work hard for something they believe in than enjoy a life of pampered idleness. So Jesus' question probes our values and invites us to this holy adventure.

What are you looking for? Bono of U2 fame was so enchanted with the question that he composed a song you may remember that begins with these words: "I have climbed the highest mountains, I have run through the fields...but I still haven't found what I'm looking for." He calls it a "gospel song with a restless spirit." In an interview last year, Bono revealed some of his faith journey as a Christian tied to his growing up in Ireland. The band members met in the 70's during a tumultuous time. Bono survived one of the bloodiest moments in Ireland's history simply because he rode his bike to school May 17, 1974, or else he would have been on the streets in Dublin where 3 car bombs killed 33 people. A few years later, his mother died of an aneurysm when he was just 14. "Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" is a prayer of sorts which has haunted an entire generation. It is about hope, disappointment, doubt, and faith but rather than me explaining it, let's allow Bono to do it in connection with a Gospel choir who takes the song to a whole new level (video).

What are you looking for? The disciples answer to the question is, “Where are you staying?” The word “stay” is the same word John uses again and again to mean “abide” or “remain with.” In other words, they are saying, “We’re looking for you, to remain with you.” And Jesus answers come with me, come and see. And reading between the lines, it doesn’t appear they ever looked back. Finding where Christ is staying, and staying there can change our lives. It did for Bono who is now one of the strongest advocates fighting poverty and hunger worldwide, especially in Africa. Millard Fuller was a wealthy businessman, but his life was hollow and his marriage falling apart. A friend advised him to visit Clarence Jordan in Georgia. Fuller came for lunch and stayed a month, and really for the rest of his life, as he founded Habitat for Humanity. Martin Luther King Jr. established the most transformational nonviolent revolution this country has ever seen fighting racial injustice and inequality – he came and saw what God had in store for him, but that didn’t dissuade him from his purpose. Come and see, Jesus said to Nelson Mandela, and he spent 25 years in prison and contributed to the downfall of apartheid in S. Africa. Mother Teresa came and saw and stayed with Christ in the streets of Calcutta, treating the poorest of the poor as if they were Jesus himself offering an alternative vision for humanity.

What are you looking for? Without ever naming an address or situation, Christ says, “Come and see,” so we go, we get moving, and we see what we see. Staying with Christ, we are here in worship to open ourselves up to God, who will lead us to new places. People who stay with Christ end up doing what Christ did; caring for the hurting, listening to the lonely, feeding the hungry, praying for the brokenhearted, and bandaging the wounded. Searching for a glimpse of God, we will discover extraordinary lives and a holy adventure.