

“Looking and Seeing”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
2nd Saturday/Sunday after the Epiphany – 18 & 19 January 2020
John 1:29-42

Let’s pause for a moment’s silence to be in the presence of God together.

Does everyone have their index cards? OK. Take one of those cards, and write in the upper left hand corner a number from zero to 360. Don’t overthink it, just the first number that comes to mind.

Next, I’d like you to draw, in the upper right hand corner, an arrow pointing any direction you like. Doesn’t have to be perfectly straight. Any arrow will do.

Now, I’d like you to write down a word or a phrase – no paragraphs or sentences; just a word or a phrase – that answers, “What are you looking for?” Be honest. Don’t write down what you “should.” An honest “I don’t know,” is infinitely better than writing down what you think the “correct” answer might be. Everybody ready? OK.

Finally, if you wrote down “Jesus” or “God,” I have another question for you to answer with a word or short phrase. Why? Why is Jesus or God what you’re looking for?

Now take your other index card and copy down what you’ve written: the number, the arrow, and the word or phrase. That’s yours to take home, and I’d like you to fold the original only once and give them to me. Mother Allison and I will see them, nobody else. We just want to learn from you so that we can grow wiser and serve you better.

I understand if you’re reluctant to share, but we can’t recognize your handwriting, and remember even Bono, the lead singer for U2, confessed in a song, “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for,” and if Bono’s struggling with what’s he’s looking for, then we can all cut ourselves a little slack.

The whole point of this little exercise, of course, is to experience first-hand what it's like to answer the question Jesus asked two of John's disciples, "What are you looking for?" Unlike some people, who went out to see John because he was entertaining, and unlike others, like the priests and Levites, who came to investigate John to see if he was an imposter or the real deal, there were people who were looking for something, because they felt something missing, a hole they hoped John could fill. Some of them came to the Jordan and went away disappointed and frustrated, but some stayed around because John gave them something they needed.

I doubt that many if any of them had a clear idea what they were looking for, much less the ability to express it. Instead, they had an intuitive sense that there was something more to life, a deeper purpose than daily survival. They wanted a fresh start. John offered both: a baptism to cleanse sins that put a person on a new pathway and healed their relationship with God, and the tantalizing promise that he was simply preparing people for someone much greater, someone who would fulfill the promises of ancient prophecy and transform baptism into a much more powerful reality.

Then one day, Jesus walks by, and John shouts, "This is the guy! The Lamb of God! The Son of God! He's the One I've been getting you ready for!" And did you notice? Nothing happened. At least not anything John thought it worth writing about. No, it was on the second day, when Jesus walked by again, that two of John's disciples – just two – heard John and followed Jesus. Who knows why only two, but they followed, and Jesus turned around and asked "What are you looking for?"

And they turned toward each other, and one guy arched his eyebrow and the other shrugged his shoulders, because they had zero clue. So they did what most people do when they

don't have a good answer. They deflected Jesus' question by asking one of their own, "Where are you staying?" And he invited them to "Come and see."

What they couldn't have known at the time is that their question was the only sensible answer, because "what" they were looking for was actually a "who." They weren't looking for a thing, but for a location where a particular someone would be, and they chose to come and see, and though John doesn't give us details, whatever Jesus revealed set them on fire, convinced them that he was the Messiah, and launched a serial recruitment drive – a drive still alive today, sluggish though it may sometimes be.

Jesus healed their despair with hope for the future. Jesus filled their loneliness with a community where they belonged, just as they were, yet always seeking to become wiser and kinder and more faithful. Jesus inspired them with a fierce sense of purpose that cast away the dread we feel when life seems to have no real overarching meaning.

Some of these cards I'm holding are starting to feel warm. I can't wait to see what they say, and I wonder if meaning or purpose or faith or belonging or acceptance might be written on a few of these. Maybe a few have adventure or opportunity or growth or healing or peace on them. It's going to be exciting to see what you are looking for, but here's what's really exciting.

As we look, Jesus is looking, too. Straight at us, all the way down into the depths of our souls. Jesus is looking at you, right now. That can feel disturbing, I know. There are things we'd rather nobody see, especially Jesus. But he sees us, not with a critical, scrutinizing glare, but with eyes of mercy and love and forgiveness. We can try to hide, but that's a waste of time, because Jesus will look until he finds us. We can forget that we're being watched over, but that changes nothing.

As we look for Jesus, Jesus looks at us and sees potential we cannot imagine. He sees wounds and knows how to heal them. He sees that aching emptiness inside and knows just how to fill it. He sees our aspirations and our disappointments and our fears, and Jesus knows just how to handle all three. Jesus sees it all and invites us to “Come and see,” to perceive life differently, to view it from a different direction, from his perspective, from the standpoint of *agape*, unconditional love. Because that’s what we’re looking for, a vision of love, for our life and our world.

We can catch a glimpse of that vision in so many ways. To be at peace reveals the love of Christ alive inside you, moving through you, calming the anxiety and impatience. To be filled with grace that flows through us to others opens our eyes to the love of God, saturating and surrounding us with divine meaning. To overcome fear with courage, to receive healing – all the many blessings of God open a window through which we can see a vision of love that not only transforms how we look at everything, but actually works to transform everything.

Now take a look at your card. Can you see the vision of love? Open it up again when you get home. What is it that Jesus wants you to “Come and see”? It may not come quickly. What matters most in life rarely does. Remember, the first time John identified Jesus as someone special, nobody followed him, and if Jesus needed to walk by a third day and a fourth and a fifth, he would have. So set aside some time to study it, to pray about it. Perhaps you have a close friend, somebody you’d trust with your life. Share what you wrote down with them. Follow the Lamb of God and see where he’s staying. You might be surprised to discover that Jesus has pitched his tent right in the heart of you. Amen.

