

I still haven't found what I'm looking for. What are we looking for? Do we even know? Are we looking for human success? Peace on the world's terms? A dwelling place with a saving God who has come to us? This is what John the Baptist was looking for and proclaiming out in the wilderness. The coming of the Messiah! "When compared to the other Gospels, John paints a more divine portrait of Jesus, not wanting his readers to forget or miss the fact that this earthly Jesus is God's Son who existed before all time" (Troy A. Miller, *Feasting On The Word*). Hence the reason that the first eighteen verses of John's Gospel, known as the Prologue, begins, "In the beginning was the Word..." John's witness to Jesus' lordship is in accordance with this high Christology- this way of viewing Jesus Christ as pre-existent, divine, and sharing God's nature- found in the Gospel of John. The Gospel seems to be saying, then, that Jesus is not only an agent through whom God is acting in the world, but is literally God acting in the world. Along these same lines, the Fourth Gospel reports its version of the baptism of Jesus not directly, like we read in Matthew's Gospel last week, but as a vision experienced by John, focusing exclusively on him witnessing the Spirit descending on Jesus. The Gospel writer, John, tells us at the beginning of this gospel that Jesus is the Word in the flesh, through whom all things came into being, as well as light and life for all people (vv. 1-5). John, on the other hand, is a man sent from God to testify to the light, so that all might come to believe (vv. 6-8) and become children of God (v. 12). In other words, John had a mission greater than himself. One of my favorite theologians- people who study and talk about God- is Karl Barth. He loved John the Baptist because John spent his life pointing to and preparing the way for

Jesus. Barth had a famous painting in his study of Jesus' crucifixion by Matthias Grunewald. In the center of the painting there is an image of John the Baptist pointing his finger to the cross of Jesus. It's said that when Barth would talk with a visitor about his work, he would direct them to John the Baptist in the painting, and he would say, "I want to be that finger." In one hand John has the Scriptures while his other hand, with its elongated finger, extended towards Christ on the cross, John is uttering the words, 'He must increase, and I must decrease.' This was Barth's motto in life. At every point Barth seeks to be like the Baptist, pointing us to Christ, as the single focus of John's witness and that of the church, is Jesus. I hope it's the focus and motto of any authentic Christ follower as well. Leonard Bernstein was once asked which instrument was the most difficult to play. He thought for a moment and then replied, "The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm- that's a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony." Such is the path of humility. After John's prologue ending in v. 18, the remainder of the first chapter is laid out over a series of four days (vv. 19-51). Here in the verses leading up to what we're about to read, were days one and two. Thus far, John the Baptist has given Jesus three titles: "Lamb of God," "Coming one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit," and "Son of God." Today we join the story on Day Three with the first gathering of disciples- who were John's disciples and now know based on John's witnessing and testifying- to follow Jesus. I invite you to listen for the verbs, especially how many have to do with seeing and sight, in

today's scripture reading. Before we turn to God's word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.**

"When Jesus realized that Andrew and Simon were tagging along, he turned and asked them: 'What are you looking for?' This is precisely the question each of us must answer for ourselves. What are you looking for out of life? When you come to church, or when you pray, what are you looking for? Often we need revelation to come to a true answer. Epiphany is about God's self-revelation in the incarnation. We find our true epiphany when we find our place in God's world" (Mark Abbott, *Connections*). Yeah, yeah, preacher, that sounds all nice and pretty but what does that actually look like or mean for my life?! Perhaps it means that like Karl Barth, we look to be like John the Baptist's finger-witnessing to where we see God at work in this world, especially in the midst of craziness, chaos, and uncertainty.

We aren't told directly, yet I wonder if Andrew and the other unnamed disciple knew what they were looking for?! I mean they were disciples of John the Baptist and knew, perhaps, that once John confirmed seeing God's Spirit remain on Jesus at his baptism, that he was the Son of God- the Lamb of God- or maybe they had their wonderings?! Perhaps they were curious- curious enough to follow Jesus for the day. I love Jesus' first words in John's Gospel- a question. Don't you? And then there's their question back to Jesus. "Rabbi, where are you staying?" In English, we may think they're asking where he's sleeping or dwelling at the time, but that's not what they're asking, which on the surface makes this

appear to be a disjointed conversation. The Greek word used here can also be translated as remaining or abiding and is the same word used for the Spirit “remaining” on Jesus in vv. 32-33. When we understand that “Rabbi” means “Teacher,” then it becomes a bit more obvious what the disciples mean. They want to learn from Jesus. “Where shall we go, Rabbi, to be with you, to receive what you have to offer? Where can we be in the very presence of God?”

Jesus’ response? An invitation. “Come and see.” A familiar invitation that Jesus will make in various ways to many people throughout the Gospel. “If you want to know the Word made flesh, come and see Jesus. If you want to know what love is like, come and see Jesus. If you want to experience God’s glory, to be filled with bread that never perishes, to quench your thirst with living water, to be born again, to abide in love, to behold the light of the world, to experience the way, the truth, and the life, to enter into life everlasting...if you want to know God, come and see Jesus” (Audrey West, workingpreacher.org). As a rabbi, a teacher, Jesus doesn’t just speak (although he certainly does plenty of that in John) he invites disciples into participation. Jesus invites them to follow him further so that they can discover what they seek to know. As we see in today’s scripture passage, the disciples went and remained with Jesus that 3rd day. We’re told in what seems to be very random that it was about 4:00 in the afternoon on that third day. Why does John find it important to give us this particular time of the day? Was it to let us know that Andrew and the other disciple had remained with him all day and were probably going to hang around for dinner and the evening?

Was it to let us know that this was around the time when Jesus met Simon and renamed him, Peter? Was it a foreshadowing about the testifying that would happen on the afternoon of the third day after Jesus' death? We don't know. For we're told immediately around 4:00 that Andrew found his brother, Simon Peter, to testify to what he had seen saying, "We have found the Messiah" (v. 41). Andrew then brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at Simon and said who he was and gave him a new name. These disciples also gave Jesus two titles: Rabbi and Messiah. "Seeing and naming what God is doing is about God, not about us, just as John's witness is not about himself, but about Jesus" (Stanley P. Saunders, *Connections*).

"Looking. Seeing. Finding. These are the things we are called to do, not once, but over and over again as followers of Christ. This is the heart of discipleship- not to hasten the end of our search, but to pursue it ever more deeply and intentionally. To cultivate a willingness to look. A willingness to see and be seen. A willingness to tell the truth about what we have found. A willingness to venture forth again, even when we don't know where 'home' is. The invitation to 'come and see' is an invitation to leave our comfortable vantage points and dare to believe that just maybe, we have been limited and wrong in our certainties about each other, about God, about the world. To 'come and see' is to approach all of life with a grace-filled curiosity, to believe that we are holy mysteries to each other, worthy of further exploration. To come and see is to enter the joy of being deeply seen and deeply known. Of course, seeing is always selective. We have choices when it comes to who/what we look

for, who/what we prioritize, who/what we name, and who/what we call out in each other. Today's Gospel story is not just about our seeing; at its core it is about who/what Jesus sees. It's a story about Jesus' way of looking and about what becomes possible when we dare to experience his gaze. Jesus looks at John's disciples- just as he looks at us- and calls forth our hunger, our curiosity, our hope, and our trust. He looks at Simon and sees Peter, the Rock. He looks at us and sees what lies beneath the fumbling, the fear, the mixed motives, and the doubts" (Debie Thomas, journeywithjesus.net). I don't know about you all, but I want God to give me new eyes to see like Jesus! Or do I? I need to stop looking for affirmation of what I already believe and instead see the world and others and even myself through the eyes of a God who loves all of it madly. My vision is so limited to seeing confirmation of what I already know (or think I know) that if Jesus is offering to show me more, sign me up! I want to remain with you, Jesus! (Nadia Bolz Weber). How about you?

"In John's Gospel, Jesus' ministry begins not with a mighty command to silence a demon, as in Mark; nor with a sermon to the crowds who have gathered on a mountain, as in Matthew; and not with a quotation from Isaiah to proclaim his anointing for the year of God's favor, as in Luke" (West). No, in John, Jesus' ministry begins with a simple yet complex question: "What are you looking for?" "What are you seeking?" "What do you need?" And more questions are raised for us. Will we remain with Jesus and if so, what will we say of him to others? "We would do well as we remain to wait and hear what Jesus has to say in the coming weeks

before we rush to answer his question” (David Toole, *Feasting on the Word*). And as we wait together, let us look for the light and the love around and within us. For as the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” As Jesus did with John’s disciples, he, too, invites us to, “Come and see.” And as the band, The Pairs, remind us in the song Jill is about to sing, “This little light. This little light’s gonna shine on through. So quit holding out for someone else, your time is now.” It’s 4:00 somewhere, y’all! Testify to Christ, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the light of the world! This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine. How about y’all? Won’t you join me in pointing, like John the Baptizer, to Christ, and witnessing to and being Christ’s light in this world?! Thanks be to God! Amen.