

What Are You Looking For?

A Sermon by Rich Holmes on John 1: 29-42

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You have heard the story read. John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples and as Jesus passes by he says “Look, here is the Lamb of God.” In the Old Testament as you may know, whenever you sinned you took an unblemished lamb and you were to sacrifice that lamb on the altar as a payment to God for the sin you committed. And this is what John was saying about Jesus. He would be the sacrifice who takes away the sins of the world. And as Jesus hears John describe him this way, he comes up to these two disciples and he says “That’s right. I am the Lamb of God, and the two of you need to follow me and commit your lives to me. I know everything you’ve ever done both good and bad, all your hopes and dreams and wishes. I know it all.” Actually that’s not right.

If you’ve been paying attention, you know that Jesus doesn’t approach the two men at all. Instead they start following him and as he notices he’s being followed Jesus turns around and says in the Greek “Ti zeteite? What are you looking for?” Some translations have Jesus saying “What do you want?” But I don’t think “What do you want?” is a good translation. In our culture saying “What do you want?” has a subtext which says to us “Leave me alone, stop bothering me.” “What are you looking for?” is a lot better. And so they say “Rabbi, teacher, where are you staying?” “Come and see.” So we are told they followed the Lord and they stayed with him for the day. We are told that the name of one of the two men was Andrew. So you now know that this is the story of how Andrew came to follow Jesus and become his disciple. And it is also the story of how Simon Peter would come to follow Jesus because Andrew is the one who would introduce Simon Peter to Jesus.

Isn't it a bit of an odd thing for Jesus to ask what are you looking for? Now, let me tell you why this is such an odd question. As all of you know we are sharing in a combined worship service this morning between Northminster and Calvary, and one of the things we do when we get together and have a joint worship service as we do every now and then is sort of iron out the details of how this service should look because Northminster and Calvary don't actually have the exact same services of worship. We have very similar services of worship, pretty much all Presbyterian churches do, but they aren't exactly the same. And you see, one of the differences you'll find between Calvary and Northminster is that each and every Sunday in Calvary's service we'll say the Apostle's Creed, but that isn't so at Northminster. At Northminster we sometimes say the Apostle's Creed, but we'll also say other creeds like the Nicene Creed. And I love the Nicene Creed because in the Nicene Creed we have this language you see, this language that talks about Jesus being true God of true God very God of very God begotten not made and of one being with the Father. And you might say to yourself what does all this mean? What is all this true God and very God stuff all about? Well, at the time the Nicene Creed was written there were people going around saying that Jesus was not the same as God, and the whole reason for having the creed was to say that this belief is heresy. Jesus was completely and 100 percent equal to God. And so the writers of the creed basically say when we say equal we mean equal. We mean equal in this way, and we mean equal in that way, and so they are going through every possible way Jesus might not be equal and saying no we mean equal in that way too. They're dotting their Is and crossing their Ts. Well, Northminster folks, now you know. That's what all this business about true God of true God and very God of very God is all about. When we say equal we mean equal.

But here's what I want to know. If Jesus was equal to God and equal in every conceivable way, shouldn't he already know what Andrew and this other disciple are looking for? So why would he ask what are you looking for? He's God. He already knows what they're looking for. He knows their names and what they had for breakfast and who their parents are and everything about them.

So maybe the story should have turned out the way I started to tell it. Maybe Jesus should have said to these two men, I am the one you are looking for. I know what you are seeking and I am he. I am the Messiah and I know just what sins you've committed and what you need to be forgiven for and so on and so forth. And in fact, maybe he shouldn't have even waited for them to start following him, maybe he should have simply walked up to these two men and started saying these things. Well, there are people in ministry as I'm sure you are aware who conduct themselves that way. They will send people out who will come up to you on the street and tell you exactly what all your problems are. You can't tell them anything they don't already understand, and they have a one-size-fits-all solution to all your problems, and sure they'd like to know your name, and all about your journey, but that really doesn't matter all that much. Because they have a one-size-fits-all answer to all your problems, they understand a lot more about your life than you do.

I imagine that if you are anything like me, you are rather turned off by that whole approach. But look at how different Jesus is than that. What are you looking for? A question that doesn't assume anything about you. A question that is so broad, there doesn't even seem to be a wrong way to answer it.

One time there was an evangelist, a country evangelist who was baptizing people out in the creek. Now, I'm sure you can picture the scene. People were clapping their hands and singing hymns and while the evangelist was preaching and baptizing, suddenly, a man who was clearly intoxicated bumped into the evangelist. So the evangelist said "Come here drunken sinner" and he dunked the man's head into the waters of the creek. The evangelist then said, "Brother, have you found Jesus?"

"No, preacher I ain't found Jesus."

So he dunked him in a second time. "Brother, have you found Jesus?"

"No preacher I ain't found Jesus."

So he dunked him in a third time. "Brother, have you found Jesus?"

No, I ain't found Jesus, but preacher before you dunk me in a fourth time, are you sure this is where he fell in?"

Now, obviously this is a joke, but what's the joke. Why is it a joke? Well, it is a joke because the intoxicated fellow clearly didn't understand what the evangelist meant by finding Jesus. We would say that he understood his baptism the wrong way. He may even understand the entire gospel the wrong way. And throughout the bible there are people we think understood the gospel in the wrong way. There were the people who mocked Jesus while he was on the cross who said he saved others but he can't even save himself. They didn't understand. There were the magi who came looking for Jesus in a palace because naturally they thought a new born king would be born in a palace. They didn't understand. There were the scribes and Pharisees

who sneered at Jesus because he kept company with tax collectors and sinners. They didn't understand.

But there is no way to misunderstand this question what are you looking for? There is no wrong way to answer it. For you could be looking for the Messiah, you could be looking for the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But you could also just be looking for a prophet or a good teacher, or even just a friend. You could be looking for all kinds of things.

What if here in our two churches of Northminster and Calvary, what if we were to have congregations where you are welcome here no matter what you're looking for? You could be looking for the Messiah. You could come here looking for the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But you could also be coming here looking for what we might say are all the wrong things. I recall when I was at the megachurch Peachtree Presbyterian in Georgia there were plenty of people who came for the right reasons we might say, but there were also people who went to church looking for dates, there were people who went there looking for drinking buddies, there were crooks who went there looking for people to swindle. We would say these are the wrong reasons to go to church if anything is. But what difference does it make? The question is not why anyone would come here. The question for us is whether we are making them welcome. And maybe it is through seeing that they are welcome and seeing how radically they are welcomed that they can begin to see that they only thought they knew what they were looking for. But what they were actually looking for was something altogether different.

"I have climbed the highest mountains. I have run through the fields only to be with you. I have run. I have crawled, I have scaled these city walls, only to be with you. But I still haven't

found what I'm looking for. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for. I have spoke with the tongue of angels, I have held the hand of a devil, it was warm in the night; I was cold as a stone. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for. I believe in the Kingdom come, then all the colors will bleed into one, bleed into one, but yes, I'm still running. You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains, carried the cross, of my shame, you know I believe it, but I still haven't found what I'm looking for. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

What are you looking for? A friend, prophet, a messiah, the one to save you from all your sins—the answer to all your questions, or maybe none of the above? Whatever it is you're looking for, may you always be welcome here.