

Second Sunday after the Epiphany + January 15, 2017
Atonement Lutheran Church
John 1:29-42

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“What are you looking for?”

This question by Jesus, the first words he speaks in John’s Gospel, seems to make no sense at all. John the Baptist has been standing there with two of his disciples. Jesus walks by. John says loudly—as a wild man who wears clothing of camel’s hair and eats locusts probably would—“Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples, perhaps intrigued, fall into step behind Jesus. Jesus notices this, turns to them, and says...not “What do you want?”, or “Who are you looking for?” but “What are you looking for?”

Jesus knows they already know who he is, or at least John has already told them in some detail the day before when Jesus also walked by: This is the one for whom John had been preparing anyone who would listen to him. It is God’s Son, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire, the Lamb of God whose sacrificial blood would atone for the sin of the world. So why does Jesus ask the disciples, “What are you looking for?”

This is a question for them but it is also for us. Jesus asks us, “What are you seeking?” What are you looking for? What do you need? What do we need—as individuals, as congregations, as communities? What is that you really need, not just on the surface, but deep down into the core of your being? What are you looking for?

Perhaps you are looking for hope, hope in a world that doesn’t offer us much of that.

Perhaps you are looking for hope that people will stop killing other people over big things that

in the end don't really matter, like territory and control. What good is it to rule over a country like Syria if bombed-out ghost towns have taken the place of vibrant cities? What real purpose is possibly being served when death, and not life, appears to be the goal of a political strategy?

Perhaps you are looking for hope that we can stop fighting with each other over little things that in the end don't really matter. Hope that relationships and families can be made whole again through love, the strongest force in the universe, before death claims family members and we no longer have the chance in this life for reconciliation.

Perhaps you are looking for hope that the people who can still turn the dangerous pattern of climate change around, even just a little, will come to an awareness of what is happening to our planet. Refusal to do so comes out of the fear of the loss of jobs and money and power and control in the fossil fuel industry, but can't new jobs and new sources of revenue, and money and power, be created in renewable energy fields if we simply decided to dedicate ourselves to those?

Perhaps you are looking for hope that death does not have the last word – that when we die, it's not all over. In fact, this is the hope of the Resurrection, the conviction that Jesus' victory over death means that life, not death, has the last word. This hope is the conviction that death is our final baptism, that when we die we fall asleep in Jesus' arms until that last great day when all creation is restored and reconciled in God's love, that, as Paul tells us, the seed sowed into the ground at our death is reborn a spiritual body—sown in weakness, raised in power. That is the hope that I know the family of Lloyd Jero is cherishing right now as they prepare for his funeral on Tuesday.

Or perhaps you are looking for hope on a more intimate scale, hope that you will make it through your upcoming surgery or treatments, hope that through all that you will be suffering your life can be restored to you at least in some measure, hope that you will live to see your favorite

grandchild married, and hope that that child is well loved and well cared for in that marriage.

And now perhaps what the disciples say next makes more sense. Jesus had said, “What are you looking for?” and they had answered, “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

But they are seeking God, and now they want to know where God dwells. They want to be with Jesus. Is that not what we are seeking, also—to be with Jesus, to abide with him? And he to abide with us? This deep desire is why the hymn “Abide With Me” has such power: “Change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me.”

We all navigate with difficulty the uncertainties of life—changes in school, changes in jobs or living environment, changes in our bodies, changes in health. “Don’t get old,” a dear person told me not long ago. “I don’t recommend it.” But change must come as long as we are alive. Christ alone provides us with that which “changest not.” He is the unchanging, never-ending love of God made incarnate for us, for the sake of humankind so that we can know God face to face and experience God’s mercy and forgiveness in limitless measure. Through him flows the boundless grace of God through life and death and into eternal life.

And then this leads to Jesus’ response: “Come and see.” We know what we are looking for; we know that God abides in the living Christ. So now it is simply for us to follow him: “Come and see.”

Simply, but...following Christ is anything but easy. To follow, in the context of discipleship, isn’t just to tag along. “When Christ calls a man,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, “he bids him come and die.” But Christians know that death in every form always leads to new life. Let’s explore this together as we move through the Sundays of Epiphany, in our journey toward Lent and finally to Easter. Come and see! Amen.