

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

January 22, 2023 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A)  
Given on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany because of text switch last week  
John 1:29-42

Jesus asked, "What are you looking for?"

That's a really good question. What ARE we looking for?

I think most of us aren't SURE what we're looking for. We have some GENERAL IDEA of what we need, but we can't quite put our finger on it.

It's true spiritually too. We know that we need a savior, but we're not quite sure what that MEANS. Are we looking for a rescuer? A conqueror? A friend? A confidant? Maybe ALL those things?

John the Baptist and his two disciples weren't sure either. Now you'd think that, of ALL people, John the Baptist would know who Jesus was. He was Jesus' cousin. He had recognized him in the womb. But TWICE he says in this story (TWICE for emphasis), "I did NOT know him! My whole ministry was anticipating him, but I didn't KNOW him!" The Baptist is the "voice crying out in the wilderness." He KNOWS that the world as we know it isn't as God intended it to be, and God is bringing in something far GREATER, but he can't quite make it out. Even the BAPTIST needs someone to bring him to Jesus, so GOD does; GOD pointed him out: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And then, HAVING seen, he says, "And I MYSELF have seen and have TESTIFIED that this is the Son of God."

And the Baptist's DISCIPLES aren't sure either. John TELLS them that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and they're following him, but they're kind of unsure (look over shoulder) tentative, cautious. Jesus turns around and notices them following and says, "What are you looking for?"

He asks US too: "What ARE you looking for?" He COULD have said, you and I might have said, "What do you WANT?" But JESUS says, "What are you LOOKING for?" That's a DIFFERENT question, a LOT DEEPER question. The very FIRST words he says to his FIRST two followers cut RIGHT to the heart.

Sheepishly they respond, "Well, Rabbi, where are you staying?" On one level that means, "Where do you live?" But do you think that in a few hours they'd be running to tell others that he was the Messiah, if all that had happened was, "Well, I've got my tent set up under a tree over there?"

Jesus knew what they were REALLY asking. "Where are you working? What kinds of things are you doing? We'd like to know what this all is about before we get too close." And Jesus responds, "Come and see."

And they did. They spent the whole DAY with him, and by that night, they knew for THEMSELVES who he was, and they weren't afraid to SAY it: "We have found the Messiah."

What are we LOOKING for? We're looking for the LORD. We want to see something that really matters in this world. We want to see what FAITH LOOKS like.

You see, to really KNOW Jesus, you have to see him at WORK, and you CAN'T see Jesus at work from a distance. Like the two disciples, we need to get INVOLVED. To see Jesus working, we have to get right in the MIDDLE of it. And then, we can see it for OURSELVES. Only when WE work for a world of hope and peace, can we see JESUS working in the world.

He says, "Come and see."

Joanna Adams was a gifted Presbyterian minister in Atlanta, and for a while she was in charge of a homeless shelter in one of the downtown churches. In Atlanta, there was a Christian radio station that had a talk show hosted by a sort of religious Rush Limbaugh, and he interviewed Joanna about

the night shelter. She described the ministry, "We take in homeless people; we provide lodging and food."

He was clearly suspicious. "What has this got to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

"Well," she said, "we try to show the compassion of Christ's guidance."

"You didn't hear my question. What has this got to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

"Well, we try to take care of not only their physical needs," said Joanna, "but also their spiritual needs – we try to show them compassion. We're concerned for them as human beings."

"You're not listening to my question. I want to know where is Jesus Christ in all that?"

Joanna thought for a minute and then she said, "You just have to be there to know what I'm talking about. You would just have to SEE it for yourself."

That's sort of what today's gospel means. If we want to SEE JESUS, we have to go where Jesus IS, WATCH what Jesus is DOING, and DO what JESUS DOES. Come and see.

Let me tell you about a congregation I know well, that helped SHAPE me as a pastor. Back then, they were a GROWING congregation, because their members, and ESPECIALLY their young families and children, were EXCITED about what was happening there, and they were INVITING their friends. It seemed like every couple WEEKS they added ANOTHER child, because one of their friends had INVITED them. Their Youth Director always had kids walking up to her and saying, "I want to come TOO!" I remember hearing about ONE of the kids whose PUNISHMENT one week was that he COULDN'T go to church.

I've been introducing Dante, our new Youth Coordinator, to all the things that we do in this church. There was a Tuesday when there were 5 different activities happening simultaneously in the building. He couldn't believe it. On Wednesday evenings, we go from Coffeehouse to Wednesday night faith with 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders, to Sport Court time with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, then the 9<sup>th</sup> graders join in for the worship and meal, and that's BEFORE we even START Affirmation classes. In the last few weeks, we've added a couple new students to the Peer Ministry class. Dante is already making an impact. Those new kids came because they were invited to come and see by their friends.

What do people "come and see" here at FIRST? Do they see our desire to grow closer to God? Do they see that we're warm and friendly here? Do they see that people are fed and cared for here? Do they see that we have a generous heart and a spirit of service to our community and to the world? Yes, we hope so.

But it's not really about US, it's about JESUS, and what HE'S doing THROUGH us. The invitation is to come and see the LORD. Come and see what JESUS is doing. Come and touch the waters of new life. Come and hear the words of good news. Come and taste the bread of life and the cup of mercy. With these things Jesus changes lives.

What are YOU looking for? Do you want to see JESUS? Come and see.

The Lord is alive and working. The Lord is HERE, in this PLACE. We are God's WITNESSES to that. But no one will KNOW it if we don't TELL someone.

Imagine what this place would look like if EACH of us invited just ONE other person to come to church with us, just ONE! There might even be someone in FRONT ROW if we did that!

What Jesus is doing in the place is EXCITING, and people need to SEE it, because they need to see JESUS.

So go from this place this week and INVITE someone: "Come and see. Come and see what JESUS is DOING here." Amen.