

Sermon January 15, 2023

John 1: 29-42

Rev Judy Steers

*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One."*

*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed. He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).*

In Jesus words and actions in this Gospel reading, we hear three movements of the spiritual life.

The first comes as Jesus' question to those who were trying to figure him out. John had already pointed to him and said "Look - he's the one!" The testimony of another is important here. Jesus did not begin his ministry by saying "I am an important teacher - listen to my words". No, it was others pointing TO him that gave him credibility among his followers. This was followed by the things he did.

So, John pointed towards him and said "That is the person you should listen to" "He is the Chosen One". They followed him. They wanted to see and hear for themselves. And, the very first words they hear set them back and provoke a reflection:

"What are you looking for?"

That is probably the most profound spiritual question that any of us can be confronted by. What ARE we looking for? What do we hope to find, that we are lacking? What is the deepest fulfillment we want? These are the first words of Jesus in John's Gospel. What are you looking for?

At different times of our lives, and thus, our ongoing spiritual journey, I think we have to answer that question over and over again. Earlier in my life, I might have said "supportive relationships" or "a sense of purpose and meaning in my life". Later on as I became a parent, then middle aged, then considering the journey of aging, the response to that question changes. When you retired, you probably had to ask yourself

that question anew. When your health changed, or you moved, or you lost a loved one, again, it was a new question. What are you looking for? What is the fulfillment of your deepest desire? We should not expect that to stay the same all through our lives.

In the Gospel, the small group of people who are intrigued by Jesus and have started following him seem to have an answer in that moment. They tell him that they are looking for a teacher. In another Gospel, it describes how Jesus meets moments like these with the words “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*”

Every spiritual journey has its roots in that question - “What are you looking for?”

The second movement of the spiritual life follows right after. It isn’t a quick fix, or an easy solution that these followers are looking for. They need to hear more, to see more, to lean in and learn. So their first question back to Jesus is “Where are you staying”. We want a connection with you. We want a relationship with you. We don’t want quick answers to pacify us for a moment. The spiritual life is not deepened by a quick read of an uplifting book, or a platitude in a facebook meme. It is anchored in the desire for a sustained and sustaining connection.

Jesus says to them “Come and see”. Come and see where I am staying, rest with me, let us talk together, let us grow together.

First spiritual movement: What is it that we truly seek, that we truly desire, in this moment of our lives?

Second spiritual movement: I am willing to enter into a journey, rather than a fix. I am prepared to be intentional about this.

Third spiritual movement: This is reflected in the text in the last verses of today’s Gospel reading. Andrew heard Jesus’ call. He went to find his brother, Simon “I think I have found the Anointed one, come and see”. In the verses that immediately follow this reading, Philip meets Jesus, begins to follow him and says to his friend Nathaniel “Come and see”. Our spiritual lives are not meant to be journeys in isolation, but a journey in community. You are probably here because someone said to you “Come and see” whether that was a parent or grandparent, a friend, a colleague, or, like Andrew, you were drawn to the words, the message, the music or simply the relationships with the people that walked alongside you.

Yusuf Islam, who may be better known to this crowd by his former name, Cat Stevens, wrote a song called [“To Be What you Must”](#) in 2009. It has been on my mind this week, as one of our music teachers at school led this song in chapel on Friday, as we reflected on the early life of Jesus, and the emergence of his vocational awareness:

*I have journeyed, endless miles  
Seen many harbours, where I took rest a while*

*On this boat called "near and far"  
To be what you must, you must give up what you are...*

*...Be you dust, or be you star  
To be what you must, just reach out for what you are  
An though you travel many roads  
There's only one way, and that's the one you chose.*

The song concerns the wisdom of seeking a fulfilled life. The title, and that line "To be what you must, you must give up what you are" was inspired by words of spiritual philosopher Eckart Tolle. There is an acknowledgement that we are constantly changing. The spiritual quest and the life of faith is not static, just as our lives are not static. We are always letting go. The child lets go of childhood in order to mature. The teenager lets go of a more carefree existence and takes up the responsibilities of adulthood. The young adult may become a parent, or take up other cares for the world, the older adult gives up the purposefulness of paid work, the elder gives up physical capacities, all through life, circumstances force us to give up the things or people we would like to hold on to. We are always changing and becoming. Simon, brother of Andrew, in the Gospel text experienced this in a dramatic way - he was even given a new name and identity - 'Cephas' or "Peter" - the rock on which this community would be built - and had to give up who he was to become that and live into that.

We are always being called to 'Come and see', to journey in community, and to revisit the deepest questions and longings of our hearts. Jesus calls us not merely once, but over and over to come and see how our lives can continue to reveal the love of God as we walk with him in community.