

Epiphany 2A Jan19 2020
John 1:29-42
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from the love of Father God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of Holy Spirit. *John 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." Let's pray:*

Like many of you I have listened to our Prime Minister speak about the devastating bushfires that have ravaged large swathes of our fair country. I have read blogs, heard opinions, and followed some of the rhetoric that inevitably arises. Some are looking for answers to why this happened. Some are looking for justice, others for someone to blame. Many are sick and tired of the endless political opportunism and the spin-doctoring of modern political discourse and simply switch off. But in the midst of this tragedy, I want to draw your attention away from the "gabfest" and ask you to pay attention to Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" It's a question that Australians must answer.

My concern is that amidst looking at the systems, the reasons, the institutions, and the politics that surround this catastrophe, we will miss a great opportunity to say to fellow Aussies, 'Happy are those who make the LORD their trust' [Psalm 40:4a]. Do we have John's courage to present Jesus as "'... the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" [John 1:29]? Do we, as God's church on earth have the conviction to look deeper into the human heart, to look for some way to begin healing and transforming the human heart with God's word, God's Spirit, and God's incarnational presence in us as the Body of Christ? Will we invite those we share this beautiful creation with, to look beyond the ruins and "'Come and see'" [John 1:39]?

As I reflect on the decisions our synods have to make concerning the looming shortage of pastors, the viability of Australian Lutheran College, and other concerns in our church, I again, hear Jesus' question, "What are you looking for?" Some are looking for ways to stay open another year, to find an answer to our financial difficulties. Others look for how we might make the church like it was twenty, thirty, fifty years ago. I hope we will have the faith to seek a new vision for outreach and ministry in our church communities, a vision that doesn't simply hold on to the past but one that works to usher in the kingdom.

"What are you looking for?" Jesus asks a profound question, a difficult question. It's one that exists in every life and community, yet, it's a question we would rather avoid. For most of us it's not the subject of everyday conversation or thought. To face our deepest longings, to acknowledge the emptiness inside, to inquire about what is ultimately important, is simply not polite dinner party conversation. It's too risky because it means we would have to get real, be honest, vulnerable and open. So we usually talk about trivial things until something happens that matters – a tragedy, a failure, the loss of a loved one, a challenge that seems insurmountable. That's when the question arises. "What are you looking for?"

Ultimately, Jesus drives right to the core of our discipleship, our relationship with God. How we answer his question determines how we live, how we navigate the tragedies and pain of life, and how we relate to God and our neighbour. Even if we never consciously ask that question of ourselves, we're always answering it. We answer it every minute of every day. We answer Jesus' question by our choices, the decisions we make, the priorities we establish, the relationships we create, the things we do. We answer his question by

the things we have done and the things we have left undone; the things we have said and left unspoken.

Our life, as a nation, a church, an individual, is an open history book that answers Jesus' question. However, we aren't slaves to that history. In Christ, we aren't destined to repeat history. Jesus keeps asking the question and giving us the chance to answer afresh.

So when Jesus turns and asks us, his followers, his disciples, this question, he is really asking us to choose how we will respond to his gospel. His question is for us, not him. He takes us deep into our own heart to discover the reality of our longings, desires, and emptiness. If we're honest, we find that far too often we have lived as homeless people. Too much of our life has been spent making our home in places that are far too temporary, fleeting, and passing. That's what Andrew discovered.

Andrew's question, "Where are you staying?" reveals Andrew's own sense of dislocation. He's not asking for Jesus' address. He wants to go home and believes that Jesus knows the way. He trusts that Jesus is the home he has longed for, that Jesus is the one who can fill his emptiness and satisfy his deepest desire. Andrew names the longing, the desire, the emptiness that we all feel.

Sometimes, however, we are too quick to fill the emptiness, satisfy the desire, and quench the longing. We seek solutions to problems, instead of ways to transform lives. We settle for quick, easy answers rather than living with hard questions. We look for approval from others, rather than finding our identity in Father God. Every time we do this, we cut off the longing, the desire, and the emptiness that point the way home.

These feelings, these hard questions, aren't about God abandoning us, rather, they're about the presence of God in us. They're the divine presence calling us, seeking us, loving us, guiding us home. Instead of eliminating the longings, the restlessness, the disconnectedness, we should follow them. "What are you looking for?" is the question that takes us into the human heart. "Come and see" is the invitation that takes us home, into the heart of God, and there's only one thing to do with an invitation like "Come and see." Go and look.

Jesus knows that we're all looking for something. The question is what. What are we looking for? Where is it taking us? If it's not taking us home; if it's not offering us hope and a way through the tragedies of life; if it's not filling us with compassion for the world; if it's not opening our eyes to a new way of being, a new way of seeing, a new way of living; if it's not deepening our relationships; if it's not revealing love; if it's not growing us more and more into the likeness of Christ, we are looking in the wrong place, for the wrong thing. We might want to look again so we don't settle for less than God is offering.

So, brothers and sisters, search your heart, feel its cadence, hear God calling, "Come home little lamb. Come home." "Come and see Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.