

Old Testament Lesson—Psalm 40:1-11

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord. Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

New Testament Lesson—John 1:29-42

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 Son of God." 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).

This past week, I've been thinking about what my answer to the question Jesus poses to John's disciples might be. Jesus, the Lamb of God, turns to Andrew and asks: "What are you looking for?" What are you looking for?

Well? Think about it. What *are* you looking for? How would *you* answer Jesus' question? Finally, the One John the Baptist has been telling you about—the One he and others have been waiting for has come on the scene at last!

But Jesus doesn't introduce himself to Andrew like we might expect. By this point, thanks to cousin John, Jesus' reputation precedes him. So maybe he doesn't need to. For that matter, he doesn't ask who they are either.

After turning around to notice Andrew and another person following him with awestruck faces, Jesus gets straight to the point: No exchanged pleasantries or polite chit chat...No pretense...no grand or lofty revelations...just one simple, honest question.

What are you looking for? Did you think of an answer yet?

Like you, perhaps, I can think of a number of things. Truth be told, there are many things I'm *desperately* looking for—so much so that I'm getting tired of searching...

What are you looking for? Hmm? How about an end to war and violence? Been looking for peace in Gaza and Ukraine for so long.

What are you looking for? No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to find the solution for this terrible torrent of ugly, divisive partisanship. And I can't take much more of it.

What are you looking for? Help me to find adequate mental healthcare. Better yet, help me find a place where I don't have to be so resilient all the time—somewhere I don't need to compartmentalize my everyday experiences just in order to function.

What am I looking for, Jesus? How about some words of comfort—some assurance that it's going to be okay—that you still reign—that God's Kingdom is still coming—that injustice and tyranny won't have the last word?

Those are just a few off the top of my head. What are you looking for? Hope, I think. What about you? Did you think of your answer yet?

I have to say: I'm impressed with how Andrew responds to the question here in John's gospel. Let's be honest. We don't often give Jesus' disciples a fair shake. Right?

The history of biblical interpretation has painted Jesus' close friends as these inept, bumbling idiots who get it all wrong—who miss everything worth understanding about their friend, teacher, and brother.

But not here. Here, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, Andrew knocks it out of the park. John the Baptist had clearly done his job and prepared him well.

Here, Andrew answers Jesus' question with a question of his own—almost like how another rabbi might respond...

What are you looking for, Jesus asks. What are you looking for?

Without hesitation, Andrew asks in return, "Where are you staying?" (Repeat)

What a remarkable answer from these two disciples! I mean, I can imagine a ton of other responses I would've blurted out before that one. Try putting yourselves in their sandals for a moment. Imagine what you may have been looking for in *those* days...

What are you looking for, Andrew?

Jesus, we're still looking for an end to the Roman iron fist. Where can the glory of David's kingdom be found under the boot of Roman oppression?

What are you looking for, Andrew? How about a place for me and my brother to find meaning and make a difference for our people, Israel?

What are you looking for, Andrew? Rabbi, help us find a way out of the cycle of sin and cynicism that muzzles the voices of good and righteous folks! Help us find an end to the indifference threatening to preserve the status quo.

What are we looking for, sir? How about some words of comfort—some assurance that it's going to be okay—that God still reigns—that God's Kingdom is still coming—that injustice and tyranny won't have the last word?

But more anything, perhaps, I think we're looking to be worthy of the One we've heard about so often from the Baptizer. We can't find any reason why the likes of us would be qualified to stand alongside the Lamb of God.

So I suppose we're searching for any excuse to justify our presence in your company. After all: What business do we have with the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit? What could we *possibly* do for the One who takes away the sin of the world?

We're looking for what you could possibly see in *us* of all people.

You know, my friends: Maybe we're not so different from Andrew and the other disciples. Maybe we get it right every once in a while—like Andrew's spot-on response to the Jesus he just met: "Where are you staying?"

In other words, I'm looking for wherever you choose to rest your head; because that's where I want to be—wherever you are and wherever you're going. Take me with you and I'll follow. Just remarkable, right? Well done, Andrew. Well done.

Though we have two millennia between us and those disciples, (if we put aside culture and geography) I don't think we're as different as we might first imagine. Yes, we sometimes ask the right questions. Every now and then we'll get it right. We'll know what answer to give and the next steps to take.

But more often than we'd like, we don't respond the best way. Instead, we end up in some defeatist mindset where the world's problems all appear as impossible Goliaths. We shrink away, a victim to our own learned helplessness.

We wind up in this pattern of doubting our own power and giftedness. We lose the courage of our convictions. We forget our passion and the boldness of spirit we once had.

Despite the strong start, Andrew and the other disciples are going to screw up many times. Later on, they're gonna think and say the wrong thing. They're gonna put their foot in their mouth (especially Andrew's notorious brother).

Sooner or later, they're gonna return to that place of fear and uncertainty. There will be dark valleys ahead. There's gonna be moments when the answer to "What are you looking for?" won't be "the place where you're going" but "a way out of this mess."

Jesus, I'm looking for a way out of this chaos—a way out this Orwellian madness—a way out slow, incremental progress—a way out of Roman occupation—a way out of twenty-first century imperialism. I mean, what fresh Hades is this?

Sometimes, at our wits end, we're gonna throw up our arms in frustration and wonder why Jesus even bothered to turn around and speak to us in the first place. We may even respond to Jesus' question in a way we'll regret. Sir, I'm looking for any sensible reason why you've turned your gaze toward me. What could you possibly see in me—in us?

Siblings in Christ, let's take a step back...I can tell you what Jesus sees when he looks at you and you and me and everyone made in God's image. First and foremost, Jesus sees someone worthy of being loved. Jesus sees someone with the power to truly love others. And Jesus sees someone who is gifted—who can bring hope and wholeness and healing to a world that feels broken.

That's who you really are—who we really are. We are God's beloved, my friends—called and created to reflect Christ's love into places and relationships and systems that need mending and restoration—maybe even abolition.

But here's the thing, y'all! Jesus doesn't ask or expect us to accept this on blind faith. Jesus isn't waiting for us to just take him at his word and accept our belovedness and capacity to love. No, Jesus invites us to journey with him and see this for ourselves!

Though we have plenty of reasons to trust God, Christ extends his hand anyway and says, "Come and see." Yes, although we can and should trust the Lord, God's mercy is so profound—God's compassion so deep, that God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth welcomes us as his traveling companion and lays out the greatest of offers: "Come with me and see for yourself."

Come and see how amazing you really are. Come and know how loved you are. Come and experience how talented you are. Come and witness how valued are you to this community—to the Church—to the world—and to me.

You are extraordinary. You are worthy. You are more than enough—so much more than the mistakes you'll make. You are pleasing to God. You are—we are all these things. It's part of being the Body of Christ.

Still not convinced? Well, thankfully, you don't have to take my word for it.

I guess you'll just have to come and see.

Amen.