

What Are You Seeking?

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?”** Here ends our text.

It was Sunday morning at St. Martin Lutheran Church. The pastor was preaching about the repentance of sin and Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He gave them the Sacrament for the forgiveness of their sins. Many people were in church that day to hear the pastor preach and receive the Sacrament. But often those who heard him were seeking other things.

One man sat in his pew a little annoyed. The pastor was longer than usual in his sermon and that made the whole service run five minutes longer. He was seeking to go home. On the way out the door, he shook the pastor’s hand and remarked, “You owe me five minutes pastor.” The pastor smiled and said he’d try to make it up next time, but how about coming to Bible class that morning. “No,” the man said. He hated to sit so long. He’d fulfilled his obligation. He didn’t care to know anything more. He went home, sat in his easy chair, and watched six hours of football.

As the pastor continued greeting folks in the narthex, an elderly woman of the Ladies Aid approached him. She was a big fan of the pastor. She always asked if there was anything he needed. She told the pastor she’d baked a bunt cake for him and placed it in the back seat of his car. She was seeking to please the pastor. The pastor was very grateful for her gift. He invited her to come to the mid-week Bible study that week. She said she’d think about it, but Wednesday was baking day.

The pastor went into the sacristy to take off his vestments. He turned around and found a young man standing there. “What was this guy looking for?” the pastor thought. The young man said he was new to the Christian faith and was visiting that morning. He’d listened to the pastor’s sermon and had some questions. He was seeking to know more about Jesus Christ. The pastor invited him to Bible class and afterwards he gave him a devotional Bible to read at home. The young man came to the mid-week Bible study that week. Then the pastor invited him to come to his adult information class about the Christian faith. The young man not only came, but he brought along his older brother. He brought him to Jesus.

John the Baptist was preaching along the Jordan River. He was preaching that the people should repent of their sins. Then he baptized them in the Jordan River for the forgiveness of their sins. Many people went out to hear John preach and be baptized. But often those who heard him were seeking other things.

Some, like the priests and Levites, only sought to know more about John so they could challenge him. “Who are you?” they asked. “We need to give an answer to the higher-ups back in Jerusalem. Why are you baptizing anyway?” But John was only vague about himself. He said, “I’m just a voice.” And then he went on to talk about someone else, someone far greater than he, someone whom they didn’t know yet. But the priests and Levites weren’t interested in this greater person. They’d fulfilled their obligation and were ready to report back to Jerusalem. They didn’t seek to know more about this unknown person, but only sought to get back home. So they left, not knowing any more than when they came.

But other people hung around John. They hung on every word he said. They were still there the next day. There hadn’t been a prophet like John in 400 years. They sought to imitate John and follow him. They were attracted to this seemingly monastic way of life. They fasted regularly. They prayed regularly. They lived in the wilderness with John. They argued about ceremonial washings. They became his disciples. They were a bunch of John the Baptist groupies. They sought to be like John. When that other prophet and his disciples showed up baptizing, they complained. They wanted to promote John and serve him. When he was imprisoned, they attended to his needs. When he was beheaded, they took his body and reverently buried it in a tomb. They sought to remain disciples of John.

But John didn’t want them to be his disciples. John was seeking something better for them. And so when he saw Jesus coming toward him, he pointed to Jesus and told his disciples, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! Now this is what I’m talking about. This is the one who is greater than I.”

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 15, 2023

John 1:29-42a

John wasn't seeking his own disciples, but he was seeking to be a disciple of Jesus. And as a disciple of Jesus, he wanted them to be disciples of Jesus, too.

And then John confessed, "I myself did not know him." Now what did John mean, "I did not know him"? His mother Elizabeth was a relative of Mary the mother of Jesus. John was related to Jesus, some kind of second or third cousin, once removed. His mother must have told him about his own miraculous birth and the miraculous birth of Jesus. He had to know *about* Jesus. But maybe he didn't recognize Jesus. He wouldn't have known Jesus in a lineup. But no, that's not what John meant when he said, "I myself did not know him." John by himself didn't know Jesus as the Lamb of God and Savior of the world. This knowledge had to be revealed to him by the Word of God. So God, who sent John to baptize with water, said to him, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." After John baptized Jesus with water, he saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Jesus. Then John said, "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." John didn't know Jesus himself, but by the Word of God, this unknown person became known to John. John became a disciple of Jesus.

And what do disciples of Jesus do? They seek other disciples. They bear witness. They point others to Jesus. The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples. He looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" When his two disciples heard the word of God, they followed Jesus. Jesus turned around and saw them following him and said, "What are you seeking?" Were they seeking to question him and challenge him? Were they more Jerusalem spies? Or did they come to complain? "Our Rabbi and teacher is John. Find your own turf." No. These two disciples of John said to Jesus, "Rabbi," which means Teacher, "where are you staying?" They recognized Jesus as their teacher. They sought to follow where he went and stay where he stayed. They wanted Jesus to teach them. And so Jesus said, "Come and you will see." Not just come and see where I'm staying, but come and you'll no longer be blind about who I am. Come and you will see that I AM the Lamb of God." And so the two former disciples of John stayed with Jesus the rest of the day. They heard the word of Jesus who is the word of God and became disciples of Jesus.

And what do disciples of Jesus do? They seek other disciples. They bear witness. They point others to Jesus. One of these disciples was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The first thing he did was seek his brother Peter and said, "We have found the Messiah" which means Christ. And then he brought him to Jesus.

Tell me, what are you seeking this morning? Are you seeking to just fulfill your weekly obligation and then go home? No. This morning you're seeking to repent of your sins and receive forgiveness from the Lamb of God who takes away your sin. Did you come to this conclusion yourself? No. This was revealed to you by the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit who descended upon you at your baptism. By the Word of God you came to know Jesus as the Savior of the world. Are you seeking to please the pastor and be his disciple? I hope not. I'm seeking something much better for you. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I want you to remain disciples of Jesus Christ. And so I keep pointing you to Jesus. I keep pointing to where Jesus is present. He's present here today in His Word and in His Sacrament in the Divine Service. But Jesus is staying at other places during the week where you can spend part of your day with Him too. He's in Bible class on Sundays and through the week. He's at prayer breakfasts and the Adult Information Class. He's present when you have your home devotions. Jesus is present and teaching wherever His Word is present. And only by His Word do you become and remain His disciples.

And what do disciples of Jesus do? They seek other disciples. They bear witness. They point others to Jesus. There are people out there seeking many different things. They're people you know. They're seeking some kind of religion. They're seeking a sense of community. They're seeking someone's approval. But you're seeking something better for them. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you want them to be disciples of Jesus too. You can tell them, "Come and see where Jesus is staying. Come to church. Come to Bible class and Sunday school. Come to our church's Adult Information Class. Come and see. Come and see that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Bring your neighbor, your relative, your friend. Bring your brother to Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.