

January 15, 2107  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9  
John 1:29-41

Called to Come and See and Stay

There are two questions for us this morning in our reading from the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of the gospel of John. Two questions that kick off Jesus' life and ministry. Two questions that kick off the new year for us and a new year of being the church. Two questions: What are you looking for? And where are you staying?.

The first question, 'what are you looking for?' might seem like a bit of a no-brainer for us on Sunday morning. We are in church and in church the answer, of course, seems obvious. Because the answer to everything in church is Jesus, of course. That's the answer, right? That's the answer to the question. What are we looking for? We are looking for Jesus. And that might be sufficient. Except that it's Jesus who asks the question in our story from John's gospel. And the disciples have already found Jesus. They are standing there with him. They have located him and and joined up with him. Congratulations, Jesus says, you found me. Now, what are you looking for? There must be something more to all this than just locating the Son of God. Jesus wants us to think about why. He

wants us to think what we are seeking: “What are you looking for with me? What are you hoping I will be for you?”

Maybe the question caught the disciples by surprise. They had gone to find Jesus because of John the Baptist. “Look., John said. The lamb of God! There he is.” And these two disciples of his begin to follow Jesus; because John told them to. John the Baptist had sent them. John the Baptist had recommended Jesus. They were there with Jesus because of John the Baptist. But what are YOU looking for?, Jesus asks. And suddenly, they have to think about what they are doing and why. They can’t just say they are there because John told them to be. Jesus wants them to think. He wants us to think about what we are doing and what we are looking for. He wants us to think and not just mindlessly follow him. Why are you here? What are YOU looking for? What are you Looking For?

We spend a lot of time in our lives looking for things. In our house, there is a long list of things we are currently looking for. It includes cars, marbles, mittens, socks, hats, coats, shoes, backpacks, glasses, colored pencils, waffles, toast, M&Ms, blankets, dinosaurs, keys, cellphones,

books and sometimes sermons. In our house, more often than not, it isn't about what we are looking for; as what we are NOT looking for.

Because we are always looking for something. Maybe that happens at your house too.

But whether we are at home or at work or at school, it seems we are always in search of something. Always looking. Always trying to find that thing we don't have, that we want to have. That perfect job. That perfect friend. That perfect family. The perfect report card. The perfect spot on the team. The perfect love. The perfect medication. The perfect church. The perfect country. The perfect solution to our problems. The perfect life that is finally what life ought to be. When we are happy and content and at peace because life is finally good and everything will be OK. What is it that will make everything OK?

What are you looking for? Notice the disciples don't have an answer for Jesus. They can't say exactly. And we may not be able to say exactly either. But here's where John the Baptist is important again. John the Baptist knows it isn't about having the answer; it's about looking for the answer that matters. "Look!, he says, There is the lamb of God!" And

he says it again to those around him: “Behold the lamb of God!” Twice he says it in the reading. And you have to wonder if he said it a few more times than that. Because sometimes that’s what it takes. It takes someone telling us over and over again. “Look. Look there. That’s what you need to pay attention to. That’s where you should look for the answers. Look there! BEHOLD, the lamb of God!”

Behold, John says. Look. Looking and seeing are important themes in the gospel of John. Jesus opens blind eyes. Literally and figuratively to seeing more than what’s on the surface. More than the world would have us see. To see that life is not about power and possessions and what we have and what we can get. Look, Jesus says, it’s not about keeping everything, it’s about giving it away. By giving your life away, you will have more life than you imagine. Just watch and you’ll see.

What are we looking for? What do we hope to find? Together, as the church, we hope to see. We hope to behold the lamb of God in worship and in study. We hope to see him in mission and fellowship. We hope to see Jesus and behold him and tell others about what we have seen. I can tell you what I have seen. I have had a glimpse of God’s Kingdom at the

Homeplace while people gave their time to visit with residents there. I have seen it in the garden as people worked together, growing food with their neighbors. I have seen it in the sacrifices people make for one another in love; caring for a parent or child, teaching Sunday school, paying down the building debt, giving up toys or a warm scarf for someone without. I have seen it at funerals and weddings and potlucks and baby showers as people support one another. I saw it on a youth retreat as people loved lonely, broken kids. I saw it as folks delivered Meals on Wheels. And took Christmas presents to a refugee family from Syria. I saw it, I tell you. I saw something holy when people gave their lives for others.

Maybe you have seen it, too. Maybe you have seen incredible love in action. You can say, Behold the lamb of God. That's what the church does. That's what we do as witnesses. We talk about this vision of the Kingdom. Look, look at what God is doing. Not look at me. Or at us. Or at our wonderful church. Or our amazing pastor. Or our great facilities and programs. Or our friendly members. Or our influence in the community. We aren't here to point at ourselves. Like John the Baptist,

we point beyond ourselves to Jesus. To what he has done; To how he opens blind eyes and sets captives free. And shows us the Kingdom where the Least are the greatest and the Last are first. And that to find our lives, we must lose them. That we must die to this world, and to ourselves. Because without death, there is no new life. There is no resurrection. There is no Kingdom life, if this life is the only life there is. But we are here because we know we are looking for something more. Just what are we looking for? We keep that question before us so that we will always be looking for the Kingdom. And we keep a second question before us as well. Where are you staying? Now, in our scripture reading, the disciples ask this question of Jesus. He first asks, what they are looking for, and they respond: well, where are YOU staying? That's what church is all about. It's about staying with Jesus. Once we look for him and we find him, then we remain with him. We are to abide with him. Over and over in the gospel of John, that's what Jesus says discipleship is about, staying with Jesus and abiding with him. Abide is kind of a funny word. But it's related to the word, abode; another word for house. So to abide with someone is to be at home with

them. To move in and set up your furniture and make yourself comfortable because you aren't going anywhere. It is staying put with them. And that's what the disciples do when they find Jesus in our reading. They ask to stay with him. Because that's what disciples need to do. They need to stay with Jesus and keep staying with him.

By staying with Jesus, disciples learn how to be disciples. How to be themselves. How to be in the world. How to live and love and pray and see the world as God intends. And when they stay with Jesus, they do.

But when they leave him, they lose that vision. And it happens in the gospel. The disciples don't stay with Jesus. They don't listen. They don't abide. They literally leave him when things get scary and difficult.

In the last hours of his life, when the soldiers come. When the suffering and persecution comes. When the cross comes. The disciples failed to remain with Jesus. But Jesus did not fail to remain with them. He did not fail to stick with them. Not even death could keep him from abiding with us. Because that's what God has come to do in Jesus Christ. To abide with us and remain with us no matter what.

Discipleship is about learning to abide, to stay with Jesus, to be with Jesus and to live life with Jesus. To go where he goes. To stay where he stays. To be present in this world as Jesus is present in this world. To be with others as God is with others. We practice that together. We practice that abiding with Jesus and with together. Meetings aren't just meetings, that's when we abide. Worship and Sunday school aren't just worship and Sunday school, that's when we abide. Community services, clean-up days, prayer groups, home visits, none of those are just chores or duties or obligations, those are times when we abide. As Jesus abides with us, we abide with one another.

So much of what I see us doing now is the work of abiding. Staying with Jesus. Staying with one another. And not just here inside our church. But staying with those outside. With our community, with the world around us. Doing the work of abiding with this world that God loves so much. Staying, abiding, not isolating ourselves. But doing marvelous things with others, like having Sunday school with the Methodist church.

Worshipping together with other churches. Having a youth group with others in town. Organizing with others to welcome a refugee family. Our

work is to abide in Christ together. And what joy there is when it happens.

So what are we looking for? And Where are we staying? As a church, may these questions guide us. And may we together seek to behold the lamb of God. May we seek to abide in him forever.