

“What do you seek?”  
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In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ ministry begins with a demand for silence. In Matthew, it begins with a sermon from a mountaintop. In Luke, it begins with a Scripture reading proclaiming “good news to the poor.” But it is only in the Gospel of John that Jesus’ ministry begins, not with a proclamation or a healing, but with a question: “What are you looking for?”

Jesus turns and looks at these people following him. I imagine his gaze lingering, slowly scanning their faces, their life stories hidden in the crevices of their skin. Then, Jesus asks them what seems like such a simple question: “What are you looking for?”

But it’s not such a simple question, is it? How many of us know what we’re looking for? I don’t just mean in this moment. I mean in life. Jesus’ question is better translated as “What are you seeking?” What is it that you want with every fiber of your being? What, in your heart, do you need?

If Jesus were to turn to me, in this moment, and ask this question, I’m not sure I’d know the answer. Would you?

There is one person in this story who knows, in unequivocal terms, the answer to that question. John the Baptist—at least in the Gospel of John’s telling—has no confusion about who he is, what he seeks, and why he lives.

Immediately before the passage we read today, religious authorities interrogate John the Baptist about who he is and what he seeks. They don’t think he knows. But he is clear: he is not the Messiah; he is not Elijah; he is not the Prophet. He is the voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord.

He knows absolutely what he wants. He wants the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He wants the Spirit that descends from heaven like a dove. He wants the one who will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit. He wants the Son of God. He knows that Jesus is the one he’s been waiting for, the one promised, his life’s purpose.

John knows what he wants and shouts it to the world.

And because he shouts, disciples follow Jesus. But I’m not sure if they know why they’re following. They hear these great things about Jesus, so they think he’s a guy they should probably be around. And that’s probably as far as they got in their thinking before Jesus turns and asks them that abrupt and unsettling question: “What are you looking for?”

Flustered, they respond with another question, asking where Jesus is staying the night.

Of course, they have yet to understand the truth and import of Jesus' question and their answer. They don't get it, yet. Still, Jesus invites them to come and see. Come and see what it is you, perhaps still unknowingly, seek. Come and see what you long for.

They don't realize it yet but their question, just like Jesus', may in fact contain the truth of what they seek. When they ask Jesus where he's staying, they use a word that shows up frequently in the Gospel of John. The Greek word *meno* means not only to stay but also to abide, to dwell, to exist. It is the same word used to describe how the Holy Spirit rests on Jesus. It is the same word Jesus uses when he says in John 15: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, abide in my love" (15:4-9).

The disciples' answer may have been more right than they realized. We seek *meno*—to be in God's presence. We seek to know and be where God dwells. We seek the vine from which we grew. We seek an end to this existential separation, this wandering, this loneliness. We want to be known, and seen, and loved. We want to be part of something that matters and will last.

We want to walk with Jesus.

Of course, even once we know that, we still have a long way to go before we really know what it means to dwell with God. But that's OK, because, unlike countless self-help books, even sermons, Jesus doesn't try to sell you some trite answer.

We are bombarded every day, minute by minute, with commercials and friends and politicians and preachers, who tell us they know what we seek—and if we'd only be willing to buy this, or sign that, or vote this way, we could have everything we desire.

Jesus is the only one who doesn't tell us what we want. He is the only one who invites us to discover the answer for ourselves, saying, "Come and see."

This weekend, we remember another disciple who dared to go and look. To peer beyond the world as it was and see what it might be like to dwell with God, in whom there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but all are one. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "I have a dream that one day... little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."

At some point, Jesus turned to Martin, even as Jesus turns to us now, and asked, "What are you looking for?"

It takes a lot of guts to answer. Because once we answer, we are committed. We have to walk that path. We know its sacrifices—Jesus hanging on a cross, King shot in Memphis. But we're going to get see something, oh I can't even tell you, something mighty, something beautiful. A light shining in the darkness. And we're going to get to be a part of that. We will see and know, because we have been seen and known.

Immediately after the passage we read this morning from the Gospel of John is this touching encounter between Jesus and Nathanael. Philip runs up to Nathanael, out of breath, smiling ear to ear, and says, "We've found him! We've found the promised one!" Nathanael is skeptical. He asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip answers, "Come and see." So Nathanael does, still probably not knowing what he's seeking. And when Jesus sees him, Jesus praises him for being an honest man. Nathanael asks, "How do you know me?" Jesus answers, and I'm paraphrasing here, "I saw you, Nathanael, before Philip ever called you; I've always seen you." Nathanael's eyes are opened, and he proclaims, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God!" Jesus says, "Oh you just wait. You will see greater things than these. You will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Right now, right here, Jesus turns to us and asks, "What are you looking for? Will you come and see?" He doesn't wait till we've gotten our life together, till we've graduated or gotten the right job or raised a family or figured it all out. Right now, in this messy, inconvenient moment, Jesus invites us to come and see what it means to *truly* live.

On the day before he was shot and killed, Rev. Dr. King closed his speech with these words: "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

And so, friends, I ask you: Will you come and see? **Amen.**