

January 19, 2014      2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany      John 1:29-42

At the church council meeting last week we talked a little bit about priorities and commitments in life - how faith often takes a back burner to other things. We also talked about the demands and complexities of life - and that while church can sometimes be just one more demand it is also a time and place for relief from it all.

The relationship between our faith and the complexities of life is probably not as straightforward and clear cut as we wish it would be. Many people end up feeling guilty or worried, knowing they aren't as committed as they should be. And yet real change makes dieting look easy.

We get some thoughts about all of this from our gospel reading for today. In John's gospel the very first words Jesus speaks are, "What are you looking for?" Or it can be translated as, "What do you want?" He says them to two guys who are disciples of John the Baptist who just decide to check out Jesus. This sets up a conversation between them. And like many conversations in John's gospel, every word has a double meaning.

On the surface story line the conversation goes like this: Jesus says, "What are you looking for?" They reply, "Where are you staying?" And Jesus says, "Come and see." And then they follow him and see where he is staying.

At the surface level it is an odd conversation to record. Of what theological significance is it to know what Jesus' bedroom looks like - unless you're hoping to see some posters on the wall and get a feel for what team he's going to be rooting for in the Super Bowl or something.

No, there is something much deeper going on here. Remember a couple weeks ago we had another gospel reading from John. It was the very beginning of John's gospel and it laid out the whole purpose of Jesus' life and the whole purpose of the gospel writing. We learned that Jesus' whole purpose was to reveal the heart of God - to give insider information about God. Keep that in mind as we look at the deeper level of this conversation.

Jesus' first words are, "What are you looking for?" This is a very deep question. It is a question to those two men and it is a question for us as well. When you come to Jesus what are you looking for? What do you want?

Our answers are probably as individual as we are, but it is a very important question. What you want greatly determines what you find. And, is what you want something that is open to what Jesus truly has to offer, or is it something that is restrictive, consumptive and manipulative?

Here's an example. (It doesn't directly involve wanting something from Jesus, but it is wanting something from this church, and the same question can be asked of a church.) You may remember that several years ago the VA hospital in Canandaigua was slated to be closed. There was a big uprising in the community, Canandaigua especially, and a lot of people fought to prevent it. One new family in this congregation began to push the church to join in the effort to save the VA. I said it was fine to hang up posters on the community bulletin boards and have conversations with members about it. But they wanted the church to having letter writing campaigns and have

fundraisers and become vocal and public supporters to save the VA. I said that saving the VA was a complex issue and we'd have to talk about it at church council and see how the congregation feels as a whole. But the VA issue was really just a side show with this family. It became clear what these folks wanted from a church. They really wanted a church to support their own agenda and needs. When we didn't, they got angry and left.

How does your heart deeply and honestly answer Jesus when he asks you, "What are you looking for?" Is it, like that family, someone to support our own personal agendas? Do we become upset when it turns out that our agenda is not God's agenda? Do we not pray it the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done," and yet how many prayers go up from exam rooms of students who haven't studied enough for tests, or hospital emergency rooms, or gamblers who've put bets on football games?

What are you looking for? Do you want blessings for life so that it is easy and comfortable and you can be prosperous? Many, many churches preach that - a so-called "prosperity gospel" where God wants you to be rich and successful.

What are you looking for? Some people want revenge upon their enemies. Maybe they're thoughts are exactly obvious, but they see themselves as upright and others as unworthy or wicked - and they will delight to them suffer. Believe it or not, such a thing as biblical precedent. Psalm 137 is sometimes called a "curse prayer." The Jews hated the Edomites, and the Edomites hated the Jews. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians the Edomites helped and cheered. And so we have Psalm 137. Verses 7-9 read, "Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, 'Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!' O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your children and smash them against the rocks!"

Not exactly, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," is it?

Some people want to know Jesus because they seem him as the path to eternal life. That seems to be a good motive, and it is. But even that is self-serving in a way - giving God what God wants so you get what you want.

What do you want from Jesus? We see the right answer in the two disciples of John the Baptist when they reply, "Where are you staying?" Or perhaps more literally, "Where do you abide?" Remember the hymn, *Abide with Me*? Jesus talks about abiding in God several times in the gospel of John.

The disciples want to know where Jesus abides. Does he abide in God? Does he abide in something else, something worldly?

Jesus replies, "Come and see." As I mentioned earlier Jesus came to reveal the heart of the God. These disciples have come to Jesus wanting to know the heart of God, and Jesus will show it to them. He will give them the sight their hearts desire.

That is the real reason to come to Jesus. That is the good reason to come to Jesus - to know the heart of God.

Now, our motives for coming to Jesus are our own motives. We have to be honest with ourselves. Our motives are probably mixed. Some of them might be good. Some of them might be misguided or bad. We shouldn't beat ourselves up where we find that our motives are bad. But by prayer and worship and action we want to seek to know the heart of God. That is where we find our true and everlasting home. Amen