



What Are You Looking For?

Second Sunday after Epiphany
15 January 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ.
Amen.

In the weeks leading up to my sabbatical last summer, members of the church, neighbors, colleagues, police officers from our city department, family members all would ask what are you doing for your sabbatical? I would share plans for Hawaii, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Nova Scotia; time with family; time with friends; books to read; projects to complete at home...all of this was acceptable to those who asked until I shared my plan for a silent retreat. At first, I was planning 5 days, and then 4, and finally we landed on a three-day weekend. When I would share the plan for a silent retreat – people, most people responded with, “really? Are you serious? What will you do?” And before I could offer an answer to their questions. The inevitable next comment was, “I could never. I would go crazy.” Only 2 people heard my silent retreat planning and said, “that sounds wonderful.” In the early days of the church – in the time of church fathers and mothers who would go live in the desert for years at a time – the silent retreat was considered a mark of discipleship, distinction, dedication to one’s faith in God – a celebration of one’s desire to deepen their relationship with God apart from the distraction of the voices of the world. Oh, how times have changed.

“You mean, you will turn off your phone. No email. No text messages. No interaction with anyone?” Well, that was the plan. To read book after book. To eat when and what I wanted. To sip coffee all day long while reflecting on my call, my ministry, the direction of the church I serve as pastor. I would light candles and read whole chapters of books of the Bible without interruption. And for three days – my world would condense to the simple rhythms of hunger, sleep, reflection, reading, worship, and rest. Why is all of that so foreign for we creatures, who were created to do all those things – especially rest?

What are you looking for?

It is a simple question, though I am not sure we would be ready with an answer when asked?

Truthfully, I was looking for time away – rest – like those moments the Bible so often speaks of when Jesus would get up early and step away from the disciples and the crowds to commune with God alone. I did not understand the image of Jesus finding time alone until I visited the Sea of Galilee. All over the hillsides and cliffs along the Sea of Galilee are hollowed out spaces, shallow caves, where the wind and rain are just out of reach and where Jesus could find time to rest, pray, commune with God alone. It doesn’t sound so bad when Jesus does it right?

What are you looking for?

The disciples know who Jesus is. Their original teacher, John, has told them as much. The disciples follow Jesus because John has done exactly what God called him to do – point others to the One – the Messiah – the One who takes away the sins of the world. So, the disciples follow. And when Jesus notices them, he asks them, “what are you looking for?” The disciples respond with the respectful address, “Rabbi,” teacher. And then they ask Jesus, “Where are you staying?” Students who wanted to be chosen by a rabbi, would often begin their learning by attaching themselves to a rabbi and then travel with them. For the disciples to ask Jesus, where he was staying, was their introduction to Jesus that they were willing to go where Jesus, their teacher, went. And how does



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Jesus respond? “Come and see.” Jesus does not give them an address or ask them to pick up supplies for the next chapter of their journey, Jesus simply invites them to “come and see.” The invitation is pure welcome. Even if the disciples are unsure of exactly what they are looking for, Jesus offers the invitation to come and see and figure it out along the way.

I wonder if you might remember another time when a disciple addressed Jesus with the same respectful devotion. On the third day. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away. You know the story. Angels asked her, “woman why are you crying? And after a brief exchange. Mary turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). What are you looking for Mary? The body? Graveclothes? The truth of what has happened? The one she loved, and followed, and trusted to return from the dead just as he said. Jesus knew who and what Mary was looking for in the garden as the sun rose that first Easter morning. Jesus after calling Mary by name could have offered her the same invitation he offered to the disciples, “Mary, come and see.”

So very often, we think we need to have all the answers before we ask the questions. If we prepare enough, nothing will go wrong. If we follow the rules, everything will work out. And when we cannot find the answers on our own. When our preparations fail. When the rule-following falls apart – what next? Sometimes it is about trusting the One we have known all along even when we do not know the answers to our questions. Especially when we do not know the answer to the question, “What are you looking for?”

“Come and see,” Jesus tells us. “Come and see.” And that will be everything for us. Amen.