

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

Jesus spoke to the people who started following him: “What are you looking for?” (*Jn 1:38*) As a disciple of Christ, how would you answer that question?

Different people might answer Jesus’ question in very different ways. We may long for a tangible sense of God’s forgiveness and a feeling that God cares for us personally. We may seek an increased awareness of the sacred in their lives. Some of us are looking for a sense of community and belonging with others – real relationships that can acknowledge the downside of life. Some of us want to be fed spiritually, so that we can better handle the difficulties in our lives. We may seek a sense of meaning amid injustice and tragedy. This week we remember those recovering from or mourning after last week’s shooting in Tucson, and the people of Haiti who continue to face challenges of poverty and illness from the destruction there one year ago. We may long for a sign of hope, that God is present in our world, and transforming such horrors into good.

It’s often difficult for us to articulate what we lack in our lives. Those bigger ideas and ideals, like love or justice or peace, can leave empty spaces in our lives. Empty spaces that we bring to God, seeking healing and wholeness.



Perhaps Jesus’ first disciples weren’t sure either. Notice that they didn’t seem to answer his question at all. They didn’t explain what they wanted, at the core of their beings. They may not have known. Instead, they turned around and asked him a question. “Where are you staying?” (*1:38*)

Their response was something of an answer. They apparently had a sense that to be with Jesus, or to be able to find him, would at least help them find what they were looking for. Even if we have been Christians for a long time, we all encounter times when we long for Christ's presence and guidance. We figure out that we're searching for something unknown, and the search is one that God can assist. In those times, we may want to ask Jesus, "Where are you staying?" What do we need to do to be with you and blessed by you?

I have heard that question in the background of our congregation's conversations about what will we need to do for our ministry to continue in the future. Today's gospel reading makes that prayerful question explicit for us today.



When Andrew and Simon asked the question, Jesus' response seemed to be on a different wavelength. He didn't offer a location for where he was staying. He didn't invite them to visit him later. Instead, he met them where they were. Jesus welcomed them to journey with him, to be everywhere that he stayed. "Come and see." (1:39) He invited them to take the first step toward being disciples.

Your first step toward Christ may have been recent, or a lifetime ago. In this story, we are reminded of the ways that God welcomed each of us. Through the people and the circumstances in our lives, God reaches out to us and speaks to us. Perhaps that happened before we were baptized. Perhaps baptism was our introduction. In time, we learn of the forgiving, gracious relationship that we could have with God, and with other believers. That introduction opens up the possibility of a rich, spiritual life, lived in Christ and in community. Our understanding changes as we mature. Yet it is usually in relationships, blessed by Christ, that we grow in faith. We encounter new situations, joys and celebrations. We try to offer

our gifts in challenging ways. We face trials and tribulations, and each time God draws us in. We are reminded of our baptism and God's love for us. We are fed and sustained. We continue to grow in faith and knowledge of God.

Our community of Emanuel's is in its own trial period now, as we try to peer into a foggy future. We wonder where to go to be blessed more fully by Jesus' presence. We ask, and he says, "Come and see." What does Jesus' answer mean to our congregation?

Just as God calls us back to our baptisms as individuals, the Word calls us back to dwell with God as a church. Together we profess and believe certain things about where Jesus can be found in our lives. Martin Luther wrote about this and referred to them as the seven marks of Christ's church. We can find Christ's presence in, and Christ's church where we find these things: the Word of God; confession and forgiveness; worship; Baptism; the Lord's Supper; ministry to others; and suffering. As a congregation, we have turned to many of these in the last six months. Over the summer, at council, and in Bible studies, we have engaged in reading scripture, as individuals and as a community – though we can always seek to deepen our focus on the word. We continue in our disciplines of corporate confession and hearing God's words of forgiveness. We worship and celebrate communion. Just last week we baptized others and were reminded of our ministry as baptized people.



It is the last two marks, those of ministry and suffering, that are worthy of reconsidering anew. They reflect who Jesus was when John proclaimed him the Lamb of God. He was God's gift of love, reaching out in grace, despite the sin and the suffering that he faced. We encounter Christ when we are sent out as ministers

to the world, both as individuals and as a community baptized in Christ. Serving others who are in need and seeking more just relationships with the world are ways of going to see Jesus. We encounter Christ in suffering, both our own and the suffering of others.

In the next month, many of Emanuel's leaders will be reconsidering the ways that our church family works together to serve our surrounding community. A few people will meet with representatives from three other Lutheran congregations, to explore if we can join together in ministry, service and outreach. The social ministry committee will be meeting to make plans for Emanuel's service and giving for the next few months. The stewardship committee will gather, and they often consider ways that we may invite others into our congregation's spiritual life. The women's retreat committee plans to return to their ministry of Sabbath and respite on a retreat day in March.

The preparations may be made, but I hope that you will join our prayerful pondering. As you leave our building today, leave with eyes attuned to the people and places around us. Where do you see Jesus' presence around us, with those in suffering or in need? How might we be able to serve them, and join them, in spiritual friendship? Your observations and ideas would be helpful, as we seek to be where Jesus is, and to offer our gifts to the world in his name. We may not know what will happen with the logistics of how our church pays the bills. Even so, Jesus will bless us in the journey as we continue to seek his presence, and to minister in his name.

We follow Christ, as his first disciples did, in our world today. St. Paul speaks to us, in words of our *1 Corinthians* reading today: ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in

every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.