

## What Are You Looking For?

*January 20, 2008*

(Epiphany 2 - Year A)

John 1: 29-42

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

First impressions are important.

The first words spoken by someone are to be paid attention to and taken seriously.

I remember when I first came to St. Alban's, I worked for more than a week on my first sermon to you, because I knew that those first words would set the tone for my ministry here.

And I also knew enough to know that some people would come to church on my first Sunday just to check me out.

I knew that I would be judged quickly, based on first impressions, first impressions created by my first spoken words.

In the Gospel of John, the writer of that Gospel gives an account of Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

In the Gospel of John, the writer goes on and on about Jesus for 37 verses.

Yet in those first 37 verses, Jesus himself never says a single word.

Then, in the 38<sup>th</sup> verse of John's Gospel, Jesus finally says his first words.

And Jesus' first words are a question, as Jesus turns around on his heels and asks his first two followers:

“What are you looking for?”

In John's Gospel, Jesus walks by John the Baptist and John the Baptist exclaims:

“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

And in response, 2 of John the Baptist's followers begin to follow Jesus instead of John the Baptist.

When Jesus sees these 2 new guys following him, Jesus turns on his heels and speaks his first words in John's Gospel, asking his first followers:

“What are you looking for?”

What are you looking for?

These are strange words for Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John.

These words make a unique first impression, mainly because of what Jesus did *not* say first.

Jesus’ first words are not:

“I am the Son of God, the way, the truth and the life.”

Jesus’ first words are not:

“I am pro-choice, anti-gun control, pro-prayer in schools and tough on issues of national security.”

Jesus’ first words are not:

“I am the *real* candidate of change.”

No, Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John occur when Jesus turns around and asks his first followers:

“What are you looking for?”

Yesterday morning, our son, John, asked me what today’s sermon was going to be about.

Being a true preacher’s kid, he then asked:

“So - what’s the Gospel about tomorrow?”

I told him that the sermon was going to be about Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John and about the question that was asked of those first disciples, as Jesus asks:

“What are you looking for?”

After we talked about it for a minute as a family, we then decided that this really was a pretty good question, so we asked each other to articulate what it is that *we* are really looking for.

Now, I am not going to tell you each of my family member’s answers to that question,

But I will tell you that the answer to that question, that question about

what are you looking for, revealed the inner motivations and deepest longings in each of us.

In fact, it turned out to be such a great conversation, that I want to recommend it to each one of you.

This afternoon, after the annual parish meeting, I encourage you to go home and to ask the other members in your family:

“What are you looking for?”

If you live alone, call up a relative or a friend and tell them about this sermon, and tell them that I wanted you to ask each other:

“What are you looking for?”

And the answers to that question do not have to be religious.

Some answers can be:

That you are looking for closeness and harmony in your family,

That you are looking for friends to hang out with,

That you are looking to make a difference in our workplace and in the world,

That you are looking for good health and wholeness,

That you are looking for time in your busy schedule to slow down and smell the roses.

You see, the amazing thing about Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John is that his words are not some lofty theological or religious statement.

Jesus’ first words are a question, a question that tells me that he cares about the inner motivation and longings of each one of us, as he asks us:

“What are you looking for?”

As I said, I will not tell you the detailed answers that my family members gave to that question, but I will tell you that there was a common theme in all our answers.

All of us long for and are motivated by relationships with other people.

After Jesus asked his first 2 followers that question, the disciples responded with another question, asking Jesus:

“Where are you staying?”

And then Jesus replies to his new followers:

“Come and see.”

You see, the answer to Jesus’ first question is that the disciples want to stay and hang out with Jesus, because the first disciples are hungry for relationship and community.

The first disciples are hungry for love.

All of us are looking for relationships and for love, as well.

I believe that the current craze of text messaging using cell phones stems from our desire to be in relationship and community with each other.

In prior generations, we would actually use a telephone to talk to each other.

Or in prior generations we would hang out at the drive-in or at the soda fountain, looking for relationship and community.

Yet in every generation, we have asked each other the question:

“What are you looking for?”

And what we have discovered is that we want love and relationship and community.

This church, St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, is a safe place where we can ask each other that question:

“What are you looking for?”

And we can reply with a variety of responses and motivations, all within a non-judgmental community of followers of Jesus.

Because, if you notice, Jesus does not ask us right off the bat if we believe that he is the Son of God.

Jesus does not ask us if we are pro-choice, anti-gun control, pro-prayer in schools and tough on issues of national security.

He does not ask us about “family values” - whatever that supposed to mean.

Instead, Jesus wants to know our inner motivations and our longings, because Jesus wants to meet us where we are and hang out with us and stay with us.

Jesus wants us to come and see - come and see that the longing of God's heart is the same longing as our hearts - because all of us are looking for love and relationship.

My desire for St. Alban's is that we will continue to be a community of followers of Jesus, a group of diverse people who are all asking to stay with Jesus and to learn from him.

For Jesus wants to know our deepest longings and our inner motivations. Jesus wants us to come and see - to come and see what love looks like.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus sure knows how to make a first impression. He turns on his heels, looks into our eyes and asks me and asks you:

What are *you* looking for?

AMEN.

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