

The Search

Matthew 4:12-23

INTRO:

Does this ever happen to you? *You try to find something, but you just can't find it! It is so frustrating!* Maybe it's your car keys, the remote control, or a certain shirt you are positive God wants you to wear that day, it could be anything. You search and you search and you search and you just can't find it anywhere. **So, do you just give up?**

Not if you want to drive your car, or watch television, or obey God's will with your wardrobe!

What about the really important things in life that we search for? One of the reasons we go to church and listen to so many messages is that many of us are on a search—a search for God. We spend so much of our lives looking for the meaning of life, the point of it all, the identity of the One who made us and the world. In many ways God has reached out to us, reaching out most dramatically in Jesus the Christ.

ME:

I am always searching for better ways to manage my time. I've read books, tried many different time management philosophies, and I've bought so

many apps for my iPhone or my computer. Really . . . all I need is a calendar and a piece of paper on which to make a list. **But does that mean that the search is complete? Oh no! Wouldn't it be great . . . if time management searched for me?** I don't think that it will. *I don't really think that time management cares how well I do with time management!* But there are more important things that we search for, we've already mentioned that we search for God. **Wouldn't it be great if God searched for us? Well maybe He does!**

Let's pray together and take a look at Matthew's Gospel and see what God says about him searching for us:

GOD:

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John was arrested, he went to Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth and settled in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Our passage begins with the move to Galilee. Jesus heard the news about John the baptist being arrested and He moved to where the prophet Isaiah said that He would:

14 This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said:

15 Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,

alongside the sea, across the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles,

16 the people who lived in the dark

have seen a great light,

and a light has come upon those

who lived in the region

and in shadow of death.

17 From that time Jesus began to announce, “Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!”

So, Jesus has begun preaching! Matthew shows Jesus calling the first disciples. We don't know if they had heard His preaching or not, but they must have heard of Jesus, because watch this:

18 As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, because they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” he said, “and I'll show you how to fish for people.” 20 Right away, they left their nets and followed him. 21 Continuing on, he saw another set of brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father repairing their nets. Jesus called

them and 22 immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

What faith these first disciples had! They just dropped their nets and abandoned their dad, just left him in the boat knee deep in nets and followed Jesus. Then Matthew begins to talk about Jesus' ministry to the crowds:

23 Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues. He announced the good news of the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness among the people.

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Christ is not someone that we have discovered, but rather this is God in a unique way discovering us. We could not find God on our own, so God in His wonderfully great grace, found us. As we see this morning in the text Jesus doesn't wait for people to stumble upon him; he reaches out, goes out, calls them to **"come, follow me."**

We are probably familiar with the story, *so much so that we don't realize how unusual it is!* A typical rabbi at that time did not **"call"** disciples. It was considered bad form for a rabbi to go out, beat the bushes, and ask people to become his disciples. It was the greatness of one's teaching that was supposed to naturally attract students.

But Jesus called disciples, reached out, saying, **"come, follow me."**

He still reaches, still goes out, still calls. That reaching, that loving search, is something to think about today as we consider the significance of the God who came to us in Christ. Our God is an actively seeking, relentlessly searching God, not a possessive, or inactive, or distant God. Even as the shepherd searches for the one lost sheep, as the father was constantly looking for the return of the prodigal son, or the woman tears apart her house looking for the one lost coin, so God in Christ searches, waits, looks for us.

The search. **When will we learn that we don't have to search for God the way we search for our car keys, the remote, or whatever?** I read about this man who was on a search. He made a rather sudden move to the right. He became interested in evangelical Christianity. Rumor had it that he was at a fundamentalist Christian Church on the edge of town. He bragged to somebody that he was in a Bible study every night.

Then came the 1990s. He made a trip out to the West Coast. He spent two weeks on a retreat with the theme of self-discovery. When he returned, all of his talk was about **"astral projection," "Out of body experiences,"** and other ideas that people attributed it to his **"New Age thinking."**

As the century changed into a new millennium he was at a meeting for the Democratic Party. People said that he was planning to run for public office. Other people said that, whether or not he planned to run, politics had be-

come his **“new religion.”** He was totally wrapped up in political matters, out every night, going from here to there to work for various causes.

Now this is what you would call a searcher. His interest lasted about a decade, and then he moved on to something else. Many years ago there was a book about us Americans entitled A Nation of Seekers. That's who we are, or at least who we enjoy thinking that we are. We are a nation on the move. All of us are looking for something. Some of us, like the guy we just thought about are intense seekers. Others of us are on a more restrained and subtle journey.

Are we looking for God?

Back in the 1970s our denomination participated with many others in a nationwide program of evangelism. The program was called, **“I found it.”** As part of the program, bumper stickers were handed out in every church. People were to put the bumper stickers on their cars. The bumper stickers said in large letters . . . **“I FOUND IT.”** This implied they were looking for something, and now we had a last had found it. And the **“it”** that was found was . . . Jesus. In a nation of searchers, anyone who is able to stand up and shout out at last, **“I found it,”** ought to be able to draw a crowd. Because we are a nation of seekers on a journey.

The sense of being on a journey is a major characteristic of our college years. The years of college are expected to be years of searching. The stu-

dents have the idea that the important thing is to be on a journey; it is not important to ever arrive at the destination, though. In fact, anyone who stands up and shouts out, "**I found it,**" is considered to be someone who detoured from the path too soon. You see, to them the search is better than the destination.

It is like what Henri Nouwen said:

He who thinks he is finished is finished. How true that those who think they have arrived, have lost their way. Those who think they have reached their goal, have missed it. Those who think they are saints are demons.

We are searching. We are groping in the darkness. Let me show you what I mean:

A University had a program where a local businessman gave a lecture called "**My five years with a Zen master.**" 200 students sat spellbound for 2 hours, taking notes, nodding in agreement as he talked about the joys of Zen Buddhism.

Two days later a graduate student gave a lecture called "**My semester in a Benedictine monastery.**" And again, about 200 students were in attendance. They listened attentively for an hour . . . **and they were the same students!!**

We are a nation of seekers.

Intellectual curiosity is good, and though the Christian Gospels all show Jesus inviting people to be on a journey, this image of our long search, our groping for God, is not at all how the Bible tells it. Let me be as simple and clear as I can:

The Bible is not so much a long record of our search for God; it is an amazing account of the extraordinary lengths to which God will go to search for us.

Have you noticed that in the accounts of Christmas, hardly anyone in all the stories was looking for God? They weren't searching for something more meaningful in their lives. They were not looking for some way to find deeper significance. True, old Elizabeth and Zachariah are said to be awaiting the fulfillment of the promise of the God of Israel. **But what were Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds looking for?** They were simply trying to get by in life, probably because they were poor. They were searching for their daily bread, nothing more. The wisemen were on the search following the star looking for the king. But they are portrayed as not knowing where to look. In their search, they naively go asking Herod where this **"new"** king can be found.

So John begins his Gospel by talking about the **"people who have been in the darkness have seen a great light."** That's probably a good way to

describe our search. We search, but our search is little more than to grope around in the darkness.

So Christmas is not a story about how we found God, groping around in the darkness, *but it is an amazing account of how God found us!* And the story continues. Here is Jesus. And hardly ever does anyone look at Jesus and say, **"This is what I've been looking for! Here is the teaching that I've been wanting to hear!"**

It seems like people really do almost anything to avoid Jesus. But Jesus is intrusive, resourceful, relentless and reaching out to people. That's the way the Bible tells it. Old Zacchaeus climbed up the sycamore tree in order to get a glimpse of the celebrity walking by. But then the celebrity stopped and said, **"Zacchaeus, I'm going to come to your house for dinner."**

Zacchaeus climbed down from the tree, and Jesus climbed into Zacchaeus' life. Jesus, really, gave Zacchaeus some of the most important revelation. At the end of this Jesus story, the 24th chapter of Luke's Gospel, two disciples were walking away from Jerusalem. They're walking away, probably trying to get away from the horrible events of the past week when Jesus was crucified. Then a stranger appears and walks with him, talks with some, teaches them. Later, they find out that the stranger is . . . Jesus.

Jesus told stories about a shepherd who goes and beats the bushes, goes to great lengths just to find one lost sheep. And he said God's kingdom

was like a woman who ripped her house apart, searching from top to bottom until she finds her one lost coin.

There is in Jesus this reaching, this constant seeking and searching.

Look at Jesus, there is a search going on, a long, relentless search. But it is not our search for God. *It is God's search for us!* The main requirement to getting found by God, according to Jesus, is to be lost. And here is the Messiah, a savior, who just loves to seek and to save the lost.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

We could not find God on our own, so God in His wonderfully great grace, found us.

YOU:

Here are ways you can apply this to your lives today and this week. Your action steps include:

- Look for God searching for you! Even if He has already found you, maybe there's a part of you still searching for God. Look for God to find that part too!
- Look for ways that God can use you to search for others. How can you allow Him to connect to others through you and your life? Keep your eyes and ears and life open for God to use to reach others.

WE:

You remember how wonderful it felt to be found by God through Jesus Christ, right? Imagine how it will feel when you let God use you to search for others. When He finds them through you you can celebrate with them.

Just imagine.

CLOSE:

There's this one Peanuts cartoon that starts with Lucy at her five-cents psychology booth where Charlie Brown to stop for advice about life;

“Life is like a deck chair, Charlie,” she says. **“On the cruise ship of life some people place the deck chair at the rear of the ship so they can see where they have been. Others place the deck chair at the front of the ship so they can see where they're going.”**

The good “doctor” looks at her puzzled client and asks, “Which way is your deck chair facing?” Without hesitating, Charlie replies glumly, **“I can't even get my deck chair unfolded.”**

Let's pray for God to help us keep looking in the right direction.