



“What Are You Looking For?”

January 18, 2026

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

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Isaiah 49:1-7 and John 1:29-42

The writer of the Gospel of John (also known as John the Evangelist) knows how to tell a story. He doesn't bog us down with facts. Instead, he narrates the story of his own understanding of Jesus' life and death. For John, Jesus is fully human and fully God's Son. Jesus is closer to the Father than anyone has ever been, and he will return to his Father to be glorified. But during his earthly ministry, mysteriously Jesus *continues* to dwell in God's presence and speak with God *even while* he speaks to the disciples and the crowds. In his own unique way, John the Evangelist cuts to the heart of the matter—Jesus, the founder of our faith comes as the Word made flesh and the world is forever changed.

Our gospel reading begins with John the Baptist's testimony *about* Jesus. “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” he exclaims. Jesus—the Lamb of God. There are numerous references to lambs in the Old Testament. In Genesis we're told of Abraham who is instructed by God to offer up his only son as a burnt offering. At the last second, God intervenes—

providing a ram—a male lamb, caught in a thicket. God requires an offering, which, ironically, God provides.ⁱ

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Peaceful Kingdom yet to come—the one where the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.ⁱⁱ But the Lamb of God that John the Baptist is probably referring to is the lamb in the exodus story. The people of Israel have been slaves in Egypt and God sends Moses to lead them out. After repeated efforts to convince Pharaoh to “let my people go,” the angel of death comes to kill all the firstborn of Egypt. The blood of a lamb is placed over the doorway of each household of the people of Israel so that the angel of death will “pass over” and they will be spared.ⁱⁱⁱ So this isn’t a lamb of atonement—it’s a lamb of salvation. The lamb represents God’s care for God’s people. God rescues Israel in the exodus; God rescues us in the person of Jesus.

John the Baptist testifies *about Jesus*—this one baptized by water who, in turn, baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The very next day, Jesus happens by again, and again John declares, “*Look*, here is the Lamb of God.” Because John’s disciples trust him, they trust his testimony—so they turn and follow the Lamb. Jesus notices he’s being followed, and he speaks his first words in this gospel, posing a question: “What are you looking for?”—or better translated: “What do you seek?”

There it is? The million-dollar question! “What are you looking for?” And how do John’s disciples respond? “Rabbi, where are you staying?” That seems odd. Doesn’t it? Former Columbia Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Charles Campbell, offers this insight: “Asked a momentous, life-challenging question by the one proclaimed as the Son of God, the followers reply by asking for Jesus’ address.”^{iv} So dream along with me for a moment—imagine that you have found the Lamb of God walking along in Bethany. And Jesus turns, looks you in the eye, and asks, “What are you looking for?” How would you respond? Have you ever thought about it? Above all, in your pilgrimage upon this earth, what are you looking for?

As many of you know, prior to going to seminary, I spent 16 years in the medical field as a medical technologist and laboratory supervisor. The job of a med tech requires one to be a sleuth, a detective of sorts. A specimen is obtained from a patient, tests are performed and the results are provided to the physician so that he or she can make a diagnosis. When I began working in the lab in 1985 many tests were done by more “hands-on” methods through careful observations and simple procedures. These days, as with everything else, most lab results are obtained through high-tech instruments. For example, some years ago, the microbiologist could alert the physician of a general infection—but sometimes be unable to name the precise pathogen. But more often than not, these days, the exact organism can be isolated and identified and the physician is provided a computer printout with a spectrum of medications from which to choose.

Now—medicine and the wonderful technologies available put even the likes of Sherlock Holmes to shame.

My point—I know you hope I have one—my point is this: What would happen if, as the people of God, we sought answers to *spiritual questions* with the same gusto that the medical community seeks answers to *physical ones*? In the field of medicine, we've come so far. But how are we doing in our churches? Are we changing the world or is the world changing us? Are we speaking truth to power or are we shrinking in fear? Are we seeking the things of God or are we seeking power and wealth and success—like everyone around us?

“What are you looking for?” Jesus asks. And the disciples respond, “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

After giving it more thought, could it be that of all the questions the disciples could ask—they ask the *most* important one? Because they aren't seeking answers to abstract questions—they're seeking Jesus—to *be* with him, to *know* him, to *follow* him.^v And Jesus offers a grand invitation: “Come and see.”

Monday, as a nation, we celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday. Martin Luther King once said, “Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step.” And take the first step is what the two disciples do, transferring their allegiance from John the Baptist to Jesus. “Come and see,” Jesus says, and they go... I wonder what they expect. How can they imagine this Lamb of God and all the ways he will meet people where they are...all the ways he will shower them with God's love? How can they imagine their world turned upside down? How can they know these first steps will lead to new life experiences beyond their wildest dreams?

Today we sit on the other side of Easter, and we know that eventually Jesus makes the wrong people angry. Eventually, Jesus goes to the cross, exposing the violence of the world and the cost of confronting unjust power. But death will not win. Christ is victorious, rising from the dead and ascending to his Father where he continues to intercede for us. Through Jesus, new life is possible and his work continues through the Spirit...moving...creating...transforming.

Today we sit on the other side of Easter...and we have hope. Yet, we *live* in this world and we know that EVERYTHING does not *seem* new. Some things seem like the same old, same old. Long ago, evil entered the world and evil continues to taunt us—urging us to believe that evil reigns, that hatred reigns. Take for example, the sad reality that in this great country of ours, it has become the norm to connect to our news apps or turn on the television to see another mass shooting has occurred. Places change, the death tolls change, faces in the photos change—but the taking of innocent lives remains the same: 9 in a historic black church in Charleston, 26 at Sandy Hook Elementary School, 49 in a night club in Orlando, 21 at Robb Elementary School, 11 at

Tree of Life Synagogue, 26 at Texas First Baptist Church—just to name a few. Indeed, evil continues to taunt us, continues to rear its ugly head, continues to try to convince us that Jesus has made little difference in this world he came to save. But as faithful followers of Christ, we know in our hearts, ultimately, the will of God will be accomplished.

With the dawn of Jesus' earthly ministry, a new world begins—one in which love *does* override hatred—one in which death *does* lose its sting. No doubt, we live in the “in between times.” Christ has come yet we await Christ's final return when the Peaceful Kingdom will arrive for all eternity. But while we wait, we have every reason to *hope*. We hope even as we continue to *pray* and *work*—to do all that we can to make this day better—this place better—this world better. And we can pray and work with confidence because we are not alone. We are empowered by Christ's own Spirit—to live out God's love with energy and creativity—to be a witness of God's mercy and grace—in our homes, our schools, our offices, our church, and our community!

Again quoting Martin Luther King Jr.: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Jesus comes as light and love for us all. Jesus comes to give us what we need most in our heart and soul—*himself!* Is it Jesus that you are looking for, my brothers and sisters? Is it Jesus that you seek? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 22:8

ⁱⁱ Is 11:6

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 12

^{iv} The Lectionary Commentary, ed. Roger E. Van Harn, 484.

^v Ibid.

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