

What are You looking for? Reading: John 1:29-42 Epiphany 2/A

By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; Trinity Episcopal Church, Sutter Creek, CA 1/15/17

When Jesus turned and saw the two disciples following, he said to them: “What are you looking for?” [Jn. 1]

What are YOU looking for? What is it that motivates you? What is your deepest need? These are questions we all ask ourselves whether consciously or not. Deep down inside there is a sense of uneasiness that surfaces from time to time, making us wonder if this is all there is to life. We are born (not of our own making) and we die (also not of our own making.) What is of our own making is the path we choose during those years that exist between life and death.

So, what are you looking for? I guess a lot depends on your situation in life. Back in 1943, Abraham Maslow came up with a theory that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. Some of these needs take precedence over others. For instance, our most basic need is for physical survival. If you ask a hungry person what he is looking for, his answer will be food and water. Physical hunger almost always takes precedence over every other need. No one should have to suffer the pain of living with hunger. That is why feeding programs, outreach to the poor, and charities that relieve the hunger of others is vital to the dignity of our humanity.

After one’s physiological needs for food, water, warmth, and rest are met, safety comes next. Ask a recent migrant from war-torn Syria what she is looking for and the answer will be safety and security. To be in constant danger, unsure of your own safety and the life of your children, is not a burden that any of us should have to experience. That is why we Christians promise in baptism to seek after peace and justice.

Once our basic needs are met, people then look to fulfill their psychological needs of love, friendship, and belonging. Ask any isolated elderly person what she is looking for and you might hear something like this: “I wish I lived closer to my children.” Or “I miss my husband so much.” Being aware of this need to be loved and connected encourages us to reach out with acts of compassion, kindness, and attentiveness to those who find themselves alone. Once the need for connectedness is achieved, people then address issues of self-esteem by seeking meaningful work, respect from others, and a feeling of accomplishment.

Finally, at the top of Maslow’s pyramid of needs is the desire to achieve one’s full potential by fully realizing the ultimate meaning in life. This is called self-actualization, which in churchy terms is known as “eternal life.” Only 1% of people actually satisfy this need because life’s circumstances get in the way. A divorce, a loss of job, an injury, alcoholism, mental illness, or unhealed traumas can disrupt our movement to reaching our full potential. When these trials happen, we end up focusing our energies in meeting our more basic needs.

So when Jesus asks Andrew and the other disciple in today’s gospel what they are looking for, perhaps he wanted to access their current need and determine if he was the one who could help fulfill it. So he asks them a simple but profound question: “What are you looking for?” The gospel does not tell us what the disciples were seeking after because either they didn’t say or their response was not recorded. My hunch is, that in the person of Jesus, they saw something that was valuable and meaningful. Maybe they saw a peaceful being, a kind of spiritual guru that was centered in God and not in himself. Maybe they were looking for a teacher with a different perspective in life, one who walked a path based on compassion and grace rather than purity codes and rules. Maybe it was the recommendation from John the Baptist who pointed to Jesus as the lamb of God, the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Whatever it was, in the person of Jesus, they saw a Light that had come into the world and they wanted to bask in this Light and remain in his presence. So they asked Jesus where he

was staying. They weren't asking for his street address or the location of his tent. Rather, they wanted to dwell in his light, abide in his love, and embrace his wisdom, ready to move into a deeper spiritual reality that would offer them healing, hope, and eternal life. In summary, they wanted what he had, and they were willing to spend the time and energy to become like him.

So, what are you looking for? What are you seeking after? What do you need? These are questions worth struggling with as individuals, as families, as a congregation, and as a larger community. Without a clear direction, without a solid path, we will be tossed and turned by the vicissitudes in life, distracted in our own journey towards wholeness, settling for whatever comes our way rather than reaching personal transformation and self-actualization. If you find that your life lacks meaning, has too many detours, filled with regret, wracked with pain or devoid of joy, then maybe it is time to spend time with Jesus who invites all of us to "come and see."

Come and see what a life steeped in the Holy Spirit can offer. Come and see how forgiveness can relieve the burden of carrying a grudge and offer a new perspective. Come and see how acts of compassion and justice can heal the world of its violence and pain. Come and see how sharing your spiritual gifts can make a difference to others while giving meaning to your own life. Come and see how a life of grace can bring joy and delight to your heart. Come and see how feeding the hungry and reaching out to the marginalized can bring light into the world. Come and see the beauty and magnificence of creation and the Light that has come into the world. Come and see how you can actualize your full potential as sons and daughters of God. Come and see! And if you are so moved to embrace the Holy Mystery, experience the Divine Presence, and be filled with the Holy Spirit, then follow Jesus (his wisdom, spirit, teachings, and acts of compassion) as the way, the truth, and the life.

The historical Jesus is no longer with us. So unlike Andrew and the other disciples, we cannot be in his physical presence, walking around the Middle East, hearing his sermon on the Mount in person, and feeding the hungry with loaves of bread. However, his spirit, his wisdom, his teachings, his community of faith which we call "the Church" live on in history, inviting us to come and see and experience that peace which passes all understanding.

For too long however, Christianity has morphed into a doctrinal, philosophical system where we are encouraged to believe 10 impossible things before lunchtime. Instead of following Jesus, we have engraved his image in stone, worshipping an icon, rather than spending time in ministering to the needs of others or being open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ministry was not about Jesus. It was about showing humanity how to be actualized, reaching its full potential as sons and daughters of God. Jesus' ministry was about walking a different path, not based on immediate gratification or temporary happiness, but a path of compassion and sacrifice that would illumine us to shine with the radiance of Christ's glory.

Today's gospel (like the Jesus Movement in the Episcopal Church), invites us to come and see what true life, eternal life, has to offer. The Jesus Movement is not focused on doctrine and dogma and hierarchy and litmus tests that exclude and demean the dignity of people. The Jesus Movement is simply a return to discipleship, following in the footsteps of Jesus, going out into the world and letting the world know that "there is a God who loves us, a God who will not let us go, and a love can set us all free." "Jesus came to show us the Way to life, the Way to love. He came to show us the Way beyond what often can be the nightmares of our own devisings and into the dream of God's intending." [The Most Rev. Michael Curry] That is why when Jesus meets his first disciples he said, "Come and See" and spend some time in my presence.

So, what are you seeking? What are you looking for? What motivates you? What is it that you really need, not just on the surface but deep down in the corner of your being? "Grant Almighty God, that your people illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory." [BCP 215]