

Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Epiphany 2: January 19, 2020
Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum

Grace and Peace to you all from God, our hope and our redeemer.

This week our gospel lesson takes a break from Matthew's action-packed narrative and turns our focus toward John's account of Jesus baptism. It begins with a confession of faith from the one who would baptize him – his cousin John – who clearly wants us to be sure that we are giving credit where credit is due – since John knows this moment isn't about him – it's about Christ's coming ministry with and among God's people.

In fact – John cares so much about getting this point across that if it weren't for the other gospels, we wouldn't know much about the locust eating, camel hair wearing prophet at all.

If John had access to social media back then his twitter handle would have been something like “the lambs first follower”.

If he had Instagram it would simply be filled with photos of his hand pointing towards Christ in the world.

And if he had Facebook – his page would be devoted to sharing stories of Jesus ministry with and among his community – not his own.

Because every word that John speaks in this gospel lesson tells us exactly who Jesus is and John wants to make it clear that Jesus baptism was not about him, his ministry, or even his legacy within the world – it was about God's in-breaking hope coming near to all through Jesus.

Yet, as soon as Jesus came out of the water – it didn't stop any of John's followers from beginning to question what exactly was going on.

After all they had long thought that John was their prophet and leader. He had been doing ministry out at the Jordan River a long before Jesus had come on the scene. He had established a relationship with the people and heard their problems. He had offered them a way to receive God's repentance and peace. And while he had told them – time and time again – that he wasn't the messiah, or even Elijah who was thought to come again foretelling the future savior - this didn't stop the masses from trying to pin the job back on him.

Which is likely why we hear John react so fervently to Jesus coming in our gospel – because it's no longer about his ministry, or the water he has used to wash so many clean – it's about Jesus the messiah who has come to change everything.

Yet, when he does arrive Jesus doesn't begin his ministry in this gospel in the way we might think. He doesn't start out with an impressive command to silence a demon, as he does in Mark - or with a sermon to the crowds who have gathered on a mountain as in Matthew; and he doesn't begin with a quotation from Isaiah to proclaim his anointing for the year of God's favor, as in Luke, but he does start with a simple question for those who wished to follow him: *“What are you seeking?”*

It's a simple question worth wrestling with - as individuals, and as a congregation - since our answers will likely have a great deal to do with our focus as we live out our lives together as God's people.

Even in our lives today we encounter questions like this in a different way - when we apply for a job, attend a therapy session, or have coffee with a good friend. At their heart, these questions give us the chance to truly step outside of ourselves and evaluate what we have come to place at the center of our being when we are asked:

What motivates you?

What are you really looking for?

What is that you really need, not just on the surface level, but deep down to the core of your being?

Which is likely why Jesus begins his ministry by calling out this question to several of John's disciples who are interested in following him. He wants to know what is driving them to join him in this life of ministry as he knows it won't always be the easiest of paths to follow.

In fact, it's not too long within John's narrative before others will come to look for Jesus – but for many of them their answers to this pivotal question couldn't be more different than the disciples he first encounters. There will be crowds seeking to have the bellies filled with more than just loaves and fishes, there will be those who are lost, sick, and forgotten seeking simply to be known and seen, and there will be members of the religious authorities who will be seeking to try Jesus for his teachings – all revealing their own telling responses to Jesus life and ministry.

But these first two disciples want something different than the crowds, those looking for connection, or the religious authorities. They wanted to simply to be with Jesus and answer his question by asking one of their own: "Where are you staying?"

When the disciples respond to Jesus' in this way, they are not asking Jesus for the location of his tent, or the address of the guest house at which he is visiting; they want to know about the enduring, permanent, eternal, presence of God they have come to encounter in Christ. They want to know Jesus and for him to know without a doubt that they are seeking him.

Which leads to Jesus to offer the disciples a simple and open invitation to – *"come and see"*.

Over the last few years our congregation has been asking many questions as we continue to seek the call of God's Holy Spirit within our lives and world. Many of our questions have revolved around our very call to be the people of God here in this community, to meet our neighbor's needs, and to be a part of a wider family of God within our own lives and homes.

These are questions that have led us down an important path to take up a ministry of welcome for all – but especially to those who are often left at the margins of churches within our world – LGBTQ2SIA+ children of God, those with living with differing abilities, and those who have been told that they don't belong.

These are questions that have called us to step out in faith and sponsor refugee families and welcome new Canadians – to share our gifts of time, support, care, and friendship as we walk alongside those in the midst of their time of transition.

These are questions that have led us to dream about how we can be better stewards of creation – to confront the issues of global warming and climate change facing our planet and world by building a resilient community where we can learn with and support one another in modeling more sustainable ways to share in our many blessings together.

And it all started with a question and an invitation to join in Christ's ministry.

A ministry not based in having the right answers or perhaps even the right questions – but one based in a faithful response to continue to “come and see” what God is doing in our lives and world today.

So, as we journey into this new year as a community of faith – I want to invite you to come and see.

To be attentive to the call of the spirit in your life and community.

To imagine what might be possible if we shared our many and varied gifts with the world in new and maybe even old ways.

And to be open to offer an invitation to a friends or neighbors to experience the life-giving presents of God you have experienced here in this place.

Holy Spirit – God continues to invite us join in such an amazing ministry in this place – and all Christ asks of you – is to be open to that call – and to come and see.

May this be so among us - Amen.