

What Are You Seeking?

January 15, 2023

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Dave Labuhn

This is the second Sunday after Epiphany. Epiphany, if you remember, is a Greek word that means “manifestation.” And, for us Christian people, on this cold morning in January, the manifestation, or revelation, is of God in the man Jesus. Last week, that was clear at the Baptism of Jesus. The heavens opened up at this event. God the Father spoke saying that Jesus was His beloved Son, and He was pleased with Him. The Holy Spirit descended from the heavens in the form of a dove and rested upon Jesus. What a clear testimony to the divinity of Jesus! And the one who witnessed all this was the one who was baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River, His cousin, John the Baptist. How astounding that this man, Jesus, was also God!

The question still remained, whether Jesus was the Messiah. Was Jesus the one who would save everyone? We cannot be sure that John the Baptist knew this until today, when Jesus came down the road toward him, and he realized who Jesus was. Inspired by God, he tells his disciples, that this was the Lamb of God. For the Jews of his day, this term, “Lamb of God,” had tremendous symbolic meaning.

The patriarch, Abraham, was directed by God to take his only son, Isaac, whom God had promised and given to Abraham, at the age of 100 years, and his barren wife Sarah, aged 90, and make a sacrifice of the boy. But, at the last moment, before killing the child, God provided a substitute for the sacrifice, a ram, and the child was saved. Later, in the Exodus, a lamb was

sacrificed. The blood of this perfect little, innocent lamb was daubed on the doorposts of each home so that the Angel of Death would pass over it. The body of the lamb was eaten in a ritualistic meal which came to be called the Seder, or Passover Meal. The blood of the lamb saved the people from death and gave them the opportunity to leave slavery in Egypt and travel to the Land of Promise, a land flowing with milk and honey.

These powerful stories from the history of God's people had great significance when John announced Jesus as the "Lamb of God." Isaiah even prophesized about a lamb in chapter 53: 6-7, "All we have, like sheep, gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter..."

When John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God," he was announcing the Savior, the Messiah. When he said that the Lamb would take away the sin of the world, he used the singular of the word "sin." This Lamb, Jesus, would take all the sin of all the world away, not just some individual sins. All the sin of all the people of all the world. Jesus was the Messiah.

John the Baptist was convinced at Jesus' baptism that Jesus was the Son of God. He was also convinced that Jesus was the Savior, the Messiah. Whether he understood Jesus to be the savior politically or theologically, at this moment, is not certain. He was so astounded by the events he had seen at the baptism that he did what he had been called to do. He announced Jesus to the people around him. The closest people were his own followers, his own devoted disciples. John had a huge following. His preaching and baptizing at the Jordan had been witnessed by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people.

John was at the peak of his popularity, but he realized that now he had to withdraw in deference to Jesus. Jesus had to take center stage. John the Baptist's disciples now needed to accept who Jesus was/is and John's relationship to Jesus. The next day, when John once again announced Jesus as the Lamb of God, two of his disciples left John and started to follow Jesus. One of those disciples was Andrew, and the other, who remained unnamed in the Gospel reading, may very well have been the writer of this Gospel, John.

God's faithful people had been waiting for the Messiah, the Christ, their savior, for years. They were particularly anxious for a savior in these days of oppression by the hated Romans. They imagined that the messiah would free them from this political oppression. The Messiah would restore the City of Jerusalem as a great capital of their independent nation, as it had been under King David during the Golden Age of their history. The Messiah would restore the nation to a position of power in the Near East as it had once been. The Messiah would heal sickness in the land which they saw as a sign of God's judgment on them. This was the Messiah they had imagined would come. This was the savior they thought God was sending them. This was the Messiah they thought John the Baptist was announcing. Little did they know that God had an even more wonderful plan in store for them, and all people, an even greater Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer.

Those two disciples did what John the Baptist had expected them to do. They followed Jesus, literally. For some odd reason, they hadn't said anything to Him. They were just following behind Jesus as He made His way along the road. Jesus knew that they were there, and He knew their perceptions of the kind of savior they were expecting Him to

be. So, Jesus turned around to them and asks them a powerful question. He asked them what kind of messiah they were looking for. He asked, “What are you seeking?” It seems to have caught them off guard. They had been taught that the Messiah would be from God. John the Baptist had testified that this Jesus was clearly from God. They expected the Messiah was going to free them from Roman domination. Wouldn't you have expected a question like, how are you going to save us? Or, when are you going to attack the Romans? How many men do you need to save us, and can we help? What is going to happen after the Romans go? How will our nation be restored to greatness? Will you be our new King? None of those questions came up. Instead, they asked Jesus where He was staying. Now, they had addressed Him honorably as a “rabbi” or a “teacher.” And Jesus had compassion for them and showed His love for them. He told them in a kindly way to come and see where He was staying. In fact, they stayed with Jesus for a whole day and then, went and found others; one found His brother.

When Jesus asked the question, “What are you seeking?” His purpose was far different, in that day, from reason to ask you today. “What are you seeking?” Yet, here, today, on this cold day in January, here in this church nave, Jesus does ask you the same question: “What are you seeking?”

If we were to ask the world this question, many people might not know the answer to that question. They might be as confused as Andrew and John were when Jesus asked them that question. Maybe you feel the same way.

Most people have some idea about what they think they are seeking. Some are looking for power, and there was a lot of

television time devoted to that last week. Power as a goal enables people to exert control and dominance over others to acquire more power and more things. Some are seeking wealth, and there was a lot of excitement about a drawing night before last. Money is a goal that can lead to power and the accumulation of a lot of nice things: cars, homes, vacations, clothes, friends, and the list goes on. Some people are seeking knowledge not for the sake of knowledge but to impress others and gain prestige and power over others. Some people seek popularity so that they can say everybody likes me, and I can get people to do anything I want because they do—there was a famous person who died last week who was extremely popular and totally miserable. But all of these goals are short term. Most of them lead to a living death. Imagine what that multi-billionaire in Maine is facing? Look at the stress, aggravation and pressure the new Speaker of the House has brought upon himself. Did you hear how depressed and wretched Priscilla Presley was in her life despite her popularity?

And you. “What are you seeking?” Are you seeking these things of this world only to find them to be just the opposite of what you thought they would be or do for you? Jesus is asking you today too. “What are you seeking?”

Those two disciples were seeking a kind of deliverance, weren't they? Problem was they were looking for deliverance from a political foe—the Romans. They wanted to gain power back for their people. They wanted to gain wealth, security and prestige for themselves and their nation again. They wanted to be the envy of other nations around them, like it was in the past. They were short-sighted. Jesus knew that. They

needed a deliverance but a different kind of deliverance than what they perceived they needed.

Most people in our world today, without knowing it, are seeking deliverance too. They think that they will be better off if they have money, or power, or great wisdom, or popularity, to name a few. Jesus does not offer that to them or to you and me. You see what we really need deliverance from, even though we do not realize it, is deliverance from sin and its effects. When we seek the things of this world, we end up like the prophet Isaiah this morning in the Old Testament reading. He said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."

The disciples, Andrew and John, and later, Peter, Andrew's brother, ended up going to the right place and seeking the right thing. It took them a long while to see who Jesus was and what sort of Messiah He was to be. It took them a lifetime to realize that the things of this world are not as important as the things of heaven, that the things of this world are temporary, but the things of heaven are forever.

What we are really seeking in our lives is deliverance from sin and all the effects of sin in our lives. But, thanks be to God, what we are seeking has been provided. Jesus, the Lamb of God, has taken away the sin of the world. Power, wealth, knowledge, popularity are still around, and the devil uses them to entrap souls and destroy them. But, for people who have a clear idea of what they are seeking and who can deliver it, there is a peace and consolation that can only be known by having faith in a Savior, in Jesus. Such people know who they are; they are children of God, and being reconciled with God means they are sons and daughters of God. Earthly popularity

pales against this status. Having the security of forgiveness of sins through Jesus gives the assurance that, even in death, there is life everlasting with the all the saints in heaven. Such security cannot be bought, bartered, or acquired by any financial power here on earth. With no threat of eternal death, everything that is done is done in this life, is to the glory of God and not for the income or prestige or power by man. Such meaning and purpose in life can never be found in any kind of personal endeavor.

And what tops the cake when we seek Jesus, the Son of God, is that we find the Father through faith. And He has promised that if you seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, all these things will be added to you. Let me remind you, God never fails to fulfill His promises. Ever.

The disciples of John may not have known why they were seeking Jesus, but they followed Him. They may not have given the right answer to His question at first, but they knew the answer later.

The word, "follow" in the gospel of John is a powerful word. These men wanted to follow Jesus. They did not simply want to hang around Jesus as innocent and indifferent bystanders. They wanted to follow Jesus as His disciple. They wanted to learn from Jesus, their rabbi. They came to understand at the very core of their beings that Jesus had something profound and practical for them. They came to learn that Jesus would teach and show them the deeper meanings of life.

And once they were with Jesus, they wanted to remain with Jesus. Their relationship was not temporary or short-lived. But Jesus did not give them great wealth, great power, great popularity, or great knowledge. He gave them simple faith in

Him and His saving work. They had a relationship with Him that transcended temporal time and He transformed their lives. It made such an indelible mark on them that they could not help but tell others about Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior.

Jesus offers us the same relationship that He offered to these disciples. He offers to teach us and to reveal to us the deeper meaning of life in order that we may experience a full, abundant life. Jesus offers us His presence in our lives and a love that absolutely nothing can separate us from. What are you seeking? Are you hanging back and wondering if Jesus is all He said He was? Or are you being distracted by all the lures of this temporal world that offer you nothing more than temporary gain and complete misery? Are you willing to take up your cross and follow Him wholeheartedly and unwaveringly?

Jesus asked another question of His disciples later in His ministry. It was, “Who do you say I am?” Are you excited enough about Jesus to go and get your brother or sister or father or cousin or neighbor or co-worker or fellow student or friend and say, “I have found the Messiah,” and He is my Savior. Have you allowed Jesus to make a transformation in your life—a transformation that makes you wealthy, powerful, wise, and popular in the faith, grace and love of God—so much so that you cannot help but tell it to the world around you?

Today, may God grant you the peace and comfort of being a redeemed Child of God and the strength of faith to share the good news of your Savior and Redeemer. Because you know what you are looking for and you know who Jesus is. Amen.