



WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

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John 1:29-46

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The Gospel of John is one long, elegant invitation. The invitation to believe, to become children of God in the world where so many do not believe or become. It is the invitation to have life, receiving the abundant life Christ makes possible.

One biblical scholar says, “Seemingly out of nowhere, Jesus enters the stage at verse 29.”¹ Seemingly out of nowhere? That isn’t right, especially in the Gospel of John. From the first verse, this Gospel affirms that Jesus has always been here: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” So it is only true that the *incarnate* Word, Jesus, enters the stage at verse 29. By the end of chapter one, we will have been given many names, titles, designations by which we may come to know him.

John the Baptist is the first to see Jesus at verse 29 and exclaims: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John is the preeminent witness to Christ and gives the very first testimony of all our testimonies ever since. “This is the Son of God,” he continues. Then repeats once more: “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

Such testimony is enough for two of John’s own disciples to follow Jesus instead. They identify him as “Rabbi” (which means Teacher) right away. One of them is Andrew—who, in every gospel, lives in the shadow of his more famous brother Simon Peter. Andrew only has two lines in this entire Gospel and one is here in verse 41...it is Andrew who tells Peter: “We have found the Messiah (which means Anointed).” Philip is the next new disciple, who tells Nathanael: “We have



found him about whom Moses and the prophets wrote...Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

The only budding disciple to interrupt this flow of faith-filled testimony is Nathanael. Along with Philip, Andrew and Peter, Nathanael is from Bethsaida. When he hears Jesus is from Nazareth, he sneers: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” It makes you wonder if that faux pas is why Nathanael is not named as a disciple in any of the other gospels and is only in this scene in John! Yet even Nathanael goes on to say to Jesus, “You are the King of Israel!”

John chapter 1 invites us to become disciples too, to come to know the One who is: The Word, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, Anointed, the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Israel! The chapters that follow show us more and more about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. By chapter 20, the invitation finishes on this wistful note: “Now Jesus did many other signs which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

From beginning to end, this Gospel invites us into discipleship so that we might experience abundant life.

When Jesus first speaks in John, he also utters words of invitation. Jesus turns to the first disciples and asks, “What are you looking for?” Then, “Come and see.”

It is still his invitation to us who would be his disciples: “What are you looking for?” In this difficult, divided world, at this particular time in your own life’s journey... What are you looking for? If we paused right now in worship and took some time to ask the person in front or behind or beside you, “What are you looking for?” And they in turn asked it of us... What would we say, each one of us, if we dared to speak the truth of our lives to one another? ‘I am looking for deeper meaning... a fresh start ... for solace... encouragement ...an opportunity to



serve...the chance to sing ...a place that calls me to generous... I'm looking for forgiveness ... for peace...to know I am accepted... I'm looking for hope...'

Now at this particular moment in your long and storied history and at this point in your interim season, I suspect that question is a bit risky to ask as a discussion question in the congregation. "What are you looking for?" is an open invitation for you to answer in a burst of unified spontaneity: **Our Next Senior Pastor!**

Recall all the names, titles and designations John offers in chapter 1 for Jesus: The Word, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, Anointed, the one Moses and the prophets predicted, the King of Israel. The disciples' expectations are off the charts, and each one has a different expectation and need they bring to their discipleship. Jesus will, by turns, surprise, disappoint, delight, fulfill and overturn all expectations.

Now, your next pastor is not going to be Jesus. And I'm not actually sure Brick Church or many Presbyterian congregations who received a MIF from Jesus of Nazareth would feel Jesus was the right fit anyway! But that question, "What are you looking for?" is worth exploring as the search continues. I ran across this description of the Perfect Pastor:

- *The perfect pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes, imparting deep wisdom, new biblical insights, peppered with famous quotes and spellbinding stories.*
- *The perfect pastor speaks the truth in love to help us live moral and faithful lives, and never hurts anyone's feelings or makes us feel uncomfortable.*
- *The perfect pastor preaches sermons that are relevant to the times in which we live, and refrains from mentioning current events about which we may not agree.*
- *The perfect pastor is 42 years old and has 35 years of church experience.*
- *The perfect pastor relates well to children, youth, and young adults and spends most of his or her time with our older members.*



- *The perfect pastor is visible in the community, attends ecumenical and interfaith events, makes frequent pastoral calls, and is always in the office when needed.*
- *The perfect pastor never misses church meetings or special events in the life of the members, and is fully available to his or her family.*
- *The perfect pastor is an excellent preacher and has a proven track record in stewardship and never preaches about money.*

What are you looking for? Prepare to be surprised, disappointed, delighted, with expectations both fulfilled and overturned.

This past week, I conducted two internet searches. One was a search of what churches are looking for in and expect of their pastors. There is a lot to read on the subject. Our own denominational Church Form details devotes ample space to what each church expects, needs, and wants in their next pastor. It asks how the pastor will help the church fulfill its goals, what personal characteristics they want in their pastor, and out of 20 possible Leadership Competencies, churches can pick 10 competencies they want the pastor to possess. One large city church is currently looking for a pastor who will “energize us to follow Christ into his kingdom in ways that attract others and also embody our mission to the homeless.” One small church with membership between the ages of 65 and 97 wants a pastor for 20 hours a week who will care for them in their declining years, attract young families and lead the youth group that currently does not exist. Another church wants a pastor who will honor long-held traditions and introduce new ideas, and manage conflict. The pastor will also need to offer well-prepared sermons to meet their goal of a full sanctuary every Sunday, and should be self-sufficient.

“What are you looking for?” But when I did my second search...what pastors are looking for in churches...there was not much out there. Most were articles aimed at making sure pastors have “realistic” expectations of congregations. Urging pastors to be understanding, patient and forgiving and to not expect too much. It did not escape my notice that the high expectations were mostly on one side of the equation between congregations and pastors.



It brought me back to John 1...and all that the disciples wanted and expected of Jesus, those lofty titles they placed on him from the start, embedded within those names were their deepest hungers and wants and needs. Yet, on Jesus' side of the equation, he turned to them not so much with expectations as with an invitation: "What are you looking for? Follow me. Come and see."

He was inviting them into his life and into a life together, which this Gospel more than once describes as an "abundant life." Jesus desired a relationship characterized by abundance. Where mercy and grace and community and hope flourishes. Where is Jesus inviting us to follow him, to "come and see" an abundance we need in our own lives? In our life together?

And where is Jesus creating abundance in our relationship with him in this time and in this place? When your Perfect Pastor shows up, or the beautifully imperfect one arrives, begin your discipleship together not only with expectations embedded in titles, but with the invitation to a relationship that will deepen over time. Invite them to "Come and see!" the abundant life of this congregation as well as the places where you hope life may flourish more or anew.

This past week, I saw abundant life here. "Come and see." It was Tuesday night about 9:30 p.m. The last of the groups had left the church when I came downstairs. One young woman lingered inside the doors on 92nd Street. George Davila, one of the sextons who works tirelessly on our behalf, was there with his characteristic kindness, gentle smile and voice. He wished me good night. I asked if he could leave soon. He replied, "It's okay"...and nodded in the young woman's direction. "She is waiting for a cab and I told her she could wait inside until it comes. It will only be a few minutes and it is cold and dark out there. Then I'll go home, too."

On Thursday morning, the Women's Bible Study gathered and Daniel's ancient word came to life among us. Friday morning, I sat with a committee of this church that has had to deal with hard things for almost all of the two years we have been together. And for the first time, as we moved through the Agenda, this time, it was



good news and hopeful signs one item after another and we all wanted to build three booths and just stay there on the mountain together.

Then at 12:30, there was a sweet moment in the Garden reception room. Teachers and church staff and school children gathered to thank Gavin for greeting us and keeping us safe year after year. There came a moment when no one knew quite what to say next. But it was as if Jesus placed a little child in the midst of us. She took hold of Gavin's leg and from the center of us she said, "Guys...guys...guys..." until she had our attention... "I have an idea...if you are sad or are missing Gavin...you can write cards to him..." And this is why to such little ones the kingdom of heaven belongs.

"Come and see," every day this past week, the abundant life Christ offers was present in this place. He offers it to us so generously every single day. The Gospel of John is one long invitation into a lifelong relationship with the One both undoes and exceeds all our expectations and descriptions of him. John was written so that we might come to believe, and believing may have life in his name. What are you looking for? Less the perfect pastor than the beautifully imperfect pastor you will likely get—and that person is looking for you, too. You will be on a journey of discovery and ministry together. Come and see!

Amen.

¹ Wes Howard-Brook, **Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship** (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 67.