The Gospel of John: What Are You Seeking?
John 1:35-42

As we return to John’s Gospel, we once again find ourselves in the company of John the Baptist who recently identified Jesus as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Let us return now to the narrative which resumes on the next day. Please stand as we read John 1:35-42.

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” 39 He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

My message this morning will fall under six subheadings: 1) the point of Gospel proclamation; 2) the power of Gospel proclamation; 3) seeking and finding; 4) bringing people to Jesus; 5) considering the evidence; and 6) our new name.

I. The Point of Gospel Proclamation

Let me remind you of the context. This story takes place in the city of Bethany, across the Jordan as we read earlier in John 1:28. It is the location where John the Baptist has been baptizing people for repentance, all the while telling people that One who is greater will soon come who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The Baptist knew that he was sent to prepare the way for God’s anointed one. He had been told by God that the anointed one would be revealed by baptism, when the Spirit descended and remained upon him. And last week we learned that this revelation recently happened…Jesus of Nazareth was recently baptized by John the Baptist, and when Jesus came up out of the water, John the Baptist “beheld the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him” (vs. 32). So in John 1:29ff, when John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him, he proclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, “After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me…this is the Son of God.”

Our passage this morning happens on “the next day,” when, again, John the Baptist is at his post in Bethany, along with two of his disciples. Jesus is passing by, and John the Baptist sees him. Why? Because the Baptist was looking for Jesus! Church, don’t miss this: Jesus is passing by, over and over again, day in and day out, but only those who are looking for Him will recognize the Lamb of God!

Arthur Pink makes this observation:

If we would “look upon Jesus,” if we would “Behold the Lamb,” we must stand still; that is, all fleshly activity must cease; we must come to the end of ourselves.

Every Christian need take this to heart: we can’t point people to Jesus if we are not first looking for Him ourselves. That will require us to stand still…to set aside busy-ness and distraction…our attention must be fixed on seeing the One who is passing by, amen?
John the Baptist sees Jesus, and he proclaims in the presence of his disciples, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” We don’t know whether the Baptist shouted out these words for everyone around to hear, or if he whispered them in awe and utter amazement. I almost think it’s the latter, because John the Apostle writes: “The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” It’s almost as though there may have been many others around, but perhaps only these two disciples, who were close to John, heard what he said. Whatever the case, when the two disciples of John hear their teacher identify and exalt Jesus as the Lamb of God, they leave John to follow Jesus.

Let me point out a few things here. First, notice that John the Baptist serves as the great prototype for Gospel proclaimers. As we saw two weeks ago, John is humble—he knows who he is and who he is not. John understands that he is just a voice crying out in the wilderness, that Jesus is his Superior in every way…and he understands that his role is to point people to Jesus.

Note also the humility of the great prophet of God. In the ancient culture, the disciples of a Rabbi cared for the needs of the Rabbi. When John’s disciples leave him to follow Jesus, we can assume that would lead to some degree of loss for John the Baptist and his ministry. But John understands what some pastors tend to forget: he is not in the business of creating disciples for himself…or supporters of his ministry. John the Baptist understands that his job is to influence people to become disciples of Jesus. Every year there are families in our church who, due to the call of Christ, leave Colonial to serve in other places throughout the world. Some of those places are on the mission field, some of those places are other local congregations right here in the metro. It took me a few years to be OK with people leaving our church family to attend and serve elsewhere, but here we see John modeling what all leaders need to remember: Christians are to follow Jesus…not us; and if Jesus calls them out, we should do everything in our power to bless, encourage, and enable their obedience, whatever that might cost our ministry here at Colonial.

Notice also that John the Baptist has one message: Behold the Lamb! NT scholar Fredrick Bruner writes:

The preacher’s one theme is Jesus Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of the one God. The crucified Jesus should not be one theme among the preacher’s many. The Bible is not about the Bible or figures in the Bible. It is about Jesus Christ—in promise in the Old Testament, in presence in the New—and every Scripture we teach should be pointed to Him exclusively.

NT scholar Arthur Pink writes:

Sometimes the servant of God needs to repeat the same message…the central truth and vital truth which God’s messenger must press, unceasingly, is the sacrificial work of Christ. Never forget, brother preacher, that your chief concern is to present your Master as “the Lamb of God!”

The point of Gospel Proclamation is always Jesus, the Lamb of God. That is not to say that we should not preach and teach the whole counsel of God that we find in the Old and New Testament…but in every sermon, in every Bible-study, the intent is always the same: teachers and preachers are to point people to behold the Lamb! As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Let us turn now to our second subheading:

II. The Power of Gospel Proclamation
Now, what happens next demonstrates the power of Gospel Proclamation. As John reports, “The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” Church, the power of Gospel Proclamation moves people to follow Jesus.

Bruner writes:

Hearing Christocentric preaching creates Christ-following disciples. This is and has been the sacred chain reaction of evangelism and of the birth of churches and of their following services from the very beginning—here—until now. John the Baptist and John the Evangelist are asking readers to join the sacred chain.

I think Bruner’s thoughts are important, and I get that I’m biased on this point, so please forgive me if I linger too long, but as Paul writes in Romans 10, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” There is something incredibly powerful about hearing the Gospel proclaimed. I have been a Christian for most of my 49 years of life, and I can tell you with certainty that my faith has been and continues to be deeply influenced by the proclamation of the Gospel. I still feed my faith and my soul by listening to sermons from those pastors who truly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, even as I attempt to do the same for you every week here at Colonial. God has used “proclaimers” like John the Baptist since the very birth of the church, and the ministry of proclamation continues to be the primary means by which the church grows and advances throughout the world. Faith still comes by hearing, so let us not neglect the steady diet of Gospel proclamation in our own lives…and that includes those of us who are proclaimers. We all need to feed upon the Holy Spirit-filled declaration of the Gospel. When the Gospel is proclaimed with power, the result is that people follow Jesus. OK, let us move now to my third subheading…

### III. Seeking and Finding

As we return to vs. 38 we will finally hear the first words ever spoken by Jesus in John’s Gospel. In vs. 38 we read, “Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’”

I love Jesus…don’t you? Everything He says is so thoughtful, intentional, and perfectly tailored to whoever He is talking to. Here Jesus asks an open-ended question that is the perfect question for all people, “What are you seeking?” What are you looking for? What are you hoping to see? What is it that you want?

I posed that question to myself the other day and I came up with a long list of possible answers! I am seeking joy, rest, peace, security, success, fun, affirmation, relief, friends…my list was long. I suspect your list would be long as well. So, let me ask you the same question: what are you seeking? Do you know? Take a minute and write some answers down…maybe share a few with your neighbor. What are you seeking? And don’t give a church answer just because you are in church! On an average day in the middle of the week…what are you seeking? What are you looking for? What do you want to happen? What do you need, such that it occupies your thoughts and motivates your actions? What is it that you seek?

Now, as we read through the Gospel, we will find that many people follow Jesus because they want something quite tangible from Him. They “seek” healing for themselves or their loved ones; they “seek” liberation from some demonic stronghold; they “seek” food or his leadership or something FROM Jesus. Such is why this isn’t the only time that Jesus will ask this question. Truth be told, if you could see Jesus standing before you (which He is!), you can be certain He would ask the same question that He asks of these men: “What do you seek?” I don’t think there
is a right and wrong answer…but we need to have an answer, and it should be an honest answer. We are all seeking something…we are all “seekers” of some kind. Such is why U2’s famous song rings true with so many of us, “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” Most of us resonate with that song…we know we haven’t found what we are looking for, but then most of us have probably never identified WHAT we’re looking for, either! Right? So Jesus asks a penetrating, very relevant question. Do you have your answer? Hold on to that as we return to the Gospel.

So…what are these seekers seeking? How do they answer Jesus? Look at the second part of vs. 38, “And they said to him, ‘Rabbi (which means Teacher), where are you staying?’”

Ironically, the disciples employ a tactic with Jesus that He regularly employs with everybody else: they answer His question with a question! They address him respectfully using the title, Rabbi (John explains to his Greek audience that Rabbi means ‘teacher’), and then they ask where He is staying. Everybody in the ancient world knew what that meant. You see, in the ancient world, if young people found a Rabbi that they admired, they would ask to stay with the Rabbi…as in they would literally move in with the Rabbi, or at least move to live very close to where the Rabbi lived, so as to spend as much time with the Rabbi as possible. So, when the two disciples ask, “Where are you staying?” they are actually answering the question posed by Jesus. Their answer is this: we want to know you; we want to learn from you; we want to know what you know; we want to be near you, to be like you, and to that end we want to be your students.

Jesus no doubt smiles at these eager disciples and He responds in vs. 39, “Come and you will see.” This phrase, “Come and you will see” was a phrase commonly employed by Rabbis in the ancient world. It was an invitation to group learning through fellowship, dialogue, and shared experiences. Yes…Jesus is saying “Come and you will see where I am staying,” but more importantly Rabbi Jesus is clearly saying, “Come, and you’ll find what you are looking for.”

I know we have people here this morning who are feeling lost; perhaps you are depressed, anxious, and confused about your life. Your soul has not been able to find peace or rest, and you are uncomfortable in your own skin…you still haven’t found what you’re looking for. Friends, no matter what you are seeking, there is One who can help, but you must follow Him to find the answers you seek. He is gracious and humble, and He welcomes all who will follow Him. His invitation to you is the same as to those who first sought Him out: “Come, and you will see!” Note that part of getting to know Jesus is spending time where Jesus is…spending time in close proximity with Him. The first disciples asked the Lord, “Where are you staying?” This might sound weird, but I can tell you for a fact that Jesus stays here…right here in this church! Jesus loves to occupy the place where His name is exalted; where His people worship Him in spirit and in truth. If you noticed something special…something warm, safe, and hopeful when you walked in the doors this morning…that’s Jesus! That’s the presence of His Holy Spirit! Jesus said that wherever two or more are gathered in His name, there He will be in the midst of them! Jesus resides here, and I can tell you that, should you stay and hang out with us, you will (over time) come to know Jesus personally…you will come to see what you have longed to see…you will find what your heart has been looking for in Him. Come, and you will see! All seekers are welcome here, for this is the household of Christ, this is the body of Christ, and there is a room here for you! Come and see… Now…let us consider some evidence.

**IV. Considering the Evidence**
As return to the text, John the Apostle gives us some very interesting details, “So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.”

For those of you unfamiliar with the ancient means of tracking time, the “tenth hour” represented the tenth hour of daylight, so that means we are talking about 4 pm or so in the afternoon. That information is relevant in that is suggests they had dinner with Jesus and likely spent the night where He was staying.

Now…notice the details of an eye-witness. John has spoken of this event happening on “the next day,” and now he tells us what time of the day the disciples began their relationship with Jesus. Tim Keller was commenting on this recently and stated:

In Reynolds Price’s introduction to his book Three Gospels, he makes the interesting point that in the ancient world, fictional narratives such as epics, legends, and myths never used details. You don’t see, ‘Oedipus went to see the Oracle at Delphi, and she came out around 4:00.’ Our Gospel passage, however, states, ‘The next day,’ not ‘Once upon a time.’ Price says that when you see such detail, it means that the author is signaling the reader that this is a legal testimony, not an urban legend. This is John’s way of saying, ‘This is an eyewitness account. I’m showing you exactly what he said and did. If you read my account, you will be able to come and see and examine the evidence the way we did.’

I know there are skeptics either here in our midst or those watching online who would love to believe in Jesus if they could only make themselves accept that the Bible is true and historically accurate. I would simply point you to so many instances where John the Apostle (and the other Gospel writers) refers to these very specific details as evidence that what we are reading is historical reportage—not myth and legend. As we study the NT with a critical eye, the evidence shows us that Jesus was a man who lived on planet earth, had a real family, real friends, and real disciples who recall down to the hour the place and time when they first met the Lamb of God! There are no such “real” persons, places or times associated with ancient myths and legends. John’s observation that it was 4:00 in the afternoon is added only because he was there, and he remembers what time it was! Ok, let us now turn to my fifth subheading…

**V. Bringing People to Jesus**

John writes in vs. 40, “One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ).”

John the Apostle reports that there were two men who followed Jesus that day, but he only reveals the identity of one of those men: Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and he writes “He [Andrew] first found his own brother Simon…” This is an sent interesting sentence in the Greek…so let us now invoke The Geek with the Greek. In the original Greek, John employs the historical-present tense, so the literal translation is be, “He first finds his own brother Simon and says to him…” The historical present tense highlights the action and make it more vivid for the reader. Next, the placement of the word “first” allows two possible translations: “He first finds his own brother” …or “He finds his own brother first.” Now why does that matter? I’m getting to that! You see, the identity of the other disciple who followed Jesus is a mystery…we are never told who the other disciple is. However, knowing that John the Apostle would have also sought out his brother, James the son of Zebedee, there is the possibility that both disciples sought out their own brothers after meeting Jesus, since both Andrew’s brother Simon and John’s brother James also become disciples and apostles of Jesus. Thus, translating the verse as “He
(Andrew) found his own brother first” suggests that the other, unnamed disciples, sought out his own brother later…perhaps suggesting that the “unnamed disciple” was, in fact, John himself. That would help us understand why John included the detail about what time of the day it was…he was there as the other disciple of the Baptist who became a follower of Jesus that day. Most, if not all, NT scholars agree that John the son of Zebedee, the writer of this gospel, is likely the other disciple; but as is always the case, John will not speak of himself throughout the Gospel until the very end, and even then we never hear his name mentioned.

The point of vs. 41 is clear regardless of the translation: Andrew seeks out his own brother Simon, and he says, “We have found the Messiah.” Again, John is writing with the Greeks in mind, so John translates the Hebrew term “Messiah” into the Greek equivalent, “Christ.” Both words mean “Anointed” or “The Anointed One,” and both have a royal quality pointing to an “anointed King.” We will unpack that further next week.

Notice once again the language of seeking and finding. Andrew was clearly seeking the Messiah, and we learn here that Andrew found what he was looking for in Jesus. Then Andrew begins to seek out his brother, so that his brother could find Jesus and find the deepest longings of his heart as well. Seeking and finding is a very common theme with Jesus; in fact, who can forget what Jesus said in Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. We will return to this theme again next week, but I hope you will leave here today honestly asking yourself, “What am I seeking? What have I found? Who am I seeking? Who do I need to bring to Jesus?”

Let us look now at vs. 42: He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter).

Andrew was clearly the younger brother of Simon, because wherever we see Andrew mentioned, he is always described as “Simon Peter’s brother.” It would not be easy for most of us to live in the shadow of our big brother, though some of us have had that experience. Nevertheless, it didn’t seem to bother Andrew. He knew who he was and who he was not; but let us remember that it was Andrew who first followed Jesus. It was Andrew who brought Simon to the Lord.

Church, whereas the chain reaction of evangelism begins with the proclamation of the Gospel; the chain reaction continues when Jesus followers bring their loved ones to Jesus. Every time we see Andrew in John’s gospel, he is bringing someone to Jesus…not out of obligation, but out of love and concern.

Percentage-wise, very few Christians are in the “proclaiming” ministry; but just about all of us can be in the “Andrew” ministry, amen? We can all share what we have found in Jesus, and we can all bring our loved ones to meet Jesus. Let me wrap up now with my sixth and final subheading…

VI. Our New Name

Something fascinating happens here at the end of our text. John remembers that Jesus looked at Simon intensely. The Greek word, emblepo, means to “fix one’s gaze upon.” Jesus has a way of looking deeply into a person…He sees not only who they are, but who they have the potential of becoming. Such is why Jesus says, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be Cephas (which means Peter).” Jesus renames Simon…and they just met! You know that had to be awkward. But why did Jesus rename Simon? Cephas (Kepa) was the Aramaic term for
Rock…or even “Rocky” according to Bruner. Petra is the Greek version of that word, and that is where the name Peter comes from. The new name given by Jesus suggests that Simon will become a firm, unmoving, foundational leader in God’s kingdom…a *petra*; but here’s what we know: Simon Peter is not any of those things as we find him in the four gospels. Simon Peter is volatile, awkward, impulsive, and ultimately a coward who denies Jesus three times when Jesus most needed his friend to be a rock. It is not until much later, on the day of Pentecost, when Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit, that he finally begins to live into his “Jesus-given” name! I hope that is encouraging to all of us!

Even now, Jesus does not simply see us for who we are…He sees us for who are becoming. Jesus knows exactly who each of us is capable of becoming…the role each of us will play in His Kingdom work. If we surrender our lives to following Him, when we receive His Holy Spirit, we can be sure that all of our trials, all of our mistakes, all of our successes, all of our idiosyncrasies, will be used, refined, shaped and employed to the end that we eventually live into His name for us!

I don’t know what His name for me is…but I trust that over time, I will grow into what He sees in me. The same will be true for all of us as we seek to follow Jesus…as we yield to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will live into the plans He has for us…the name that He has chosen for each one of us.

Church…I hope you can see how these few verses point us to Jesus, they call us to follow Him, they remind us to bring others to Jesus, and to live into God’s plan for our lives…trusting His plans for who we are becoming!

As we close, take a moment now and give Jesus your answer. Tell Him what you are seeking. Listen for Him as He calls you to “come and see.” Follow Jesus, and you will find what you are looking for. Then bring your loved ones to Jesus, that they might meet the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Let’s pray.