
Who is Jesus? Come and See

A sermon by Dean Sam Candler
Epiphany 2 – Year A

“Jesus turned and saw them following, and Jesus said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’” John 1:38

If Jesus were to appear to you right now, and ask, “What are you looking for?” how would you respond?

Some of us would say: peace! We just want some peace in our life, and in this frantic, confused world. Some of us would say: justice! We’re tired of not getting a fair shake in this world. Some of us would say: justice for all! We are tired of the poor and oppressed not getting a fair shake in this world. Some of us would say: a new leader! Some of us would say: I just want wisdom. I just want to know what makes the world click.

Some of us would say: a companion! I need a wife, a husband, a boyfriend, a girlfriend, someone to be with. Some of us would say: money! I need more money this month.

And some of us, maybe most of us, would say: really, I am not sure what it is I want. I wake up in the morning, and I wander through the day, realizing I am searching for something, but I am not sure I can say exactly what that something is. It might be peace, it might be love, it might be just a sense of honest hope that the world, and my world, will be okay.

Our gospel passage this morning, John 1:29-42, contains only thirteen verses. By my count, in these thirteen verses, there are also at least thirteen different ways that Jesus is described, at least thirteen various titles for Jesus. What were they? *Lamb of God. The One who takes away the sin of the world. The one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. The Son of God. Rabbi, which needs translation as Teacher. The Messiah, which needs translation as Anointed. The One whom Moses and the prophets wrote about. Jesus. The son of Joseph. The King of Israel.* And, finally, at the very end: *The Son of Man.*

For those of us with a long history in our Christian tradition, we have been conditioned to presume that all these titles mean the same thing. But they don’t! And especially at the time of Jesus, those titles did not always mean the same thing. The Lamb of God, someone who takes away the sin of the world, is not necessarily the same as the Messiah. The King of Israel is certainly not the same thing as the Lamb of God, because a king would certainly not submit to being sacrificed. And how could the Son of God be the same thing as the Son of Man? Yet, in these mere thirteen verses, all these titles—and more—are used to refer to one man, this new presence in Galilee, this Jesus of Nazareth.

In this powerful passage, the opening chapter of the gospel of John, we have a tremendous model for the Christian Church. Like us today, every one of the early disciples of Jesus was looking for something, but they were not all looking for the same thing!

Just like us today, some were looking to have sin forgiven. Some were looking for a messiah. Some were looking for a wise teacher, someone who would fulfill their hopes and dreams. These were all the titles they gave to their hopes. According to the Gospel of John, apparently, not one of these early followers of Jesus had known Jesus very long when they made these comments, and yet they seemed to acknowledge Jesus immediately as the answer to their search.

John the Baptist, the one who washed people in the River Jordan, was calling for repentance and looking for someone who

could take away the sin. He would title that person the Lamb of God. John the Baptist, who spoke about chopping down trees that did not bear fruit, was also looking for the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, who would fill the world with divine energy. He was looking for the person on whom the Spirit of God would descend. When he saw Jesus, seeing the answer to his hopes, he gave Jesus those titles. And, then, it seems he called Jesus the Son of God. That is still another title.

John the Baptist told others about Jesus. He declared the next day to two of his own disciples: "Behold the Lamb of God." But they addressed Jesus as "Rabbi," which is to say, "Teacher." They wanted a teacher, maybe a wise sage, who could lead with deep wisdom and courage.

"Where are you staying?" asked those disciples, as if they wanted to reside with that wisdom. Jesus replied, "Come and see." Without knowing where they were going, the disciples followed.

One of those two was Andrew. He was looking for something else, too. So when he found his brother, Simon Peter, he gave Jesus still another title. He told Peter that they had found "The Messiah," which is to say, "The Anointed." Keep in mind that this is a very different sort of title than Lamb of God, or Baptizer in the Spirit, or Rabbi. The Messiah, or Anointed one, was to be a gifted one, perhaps a charismatic figure. There are other titles; Nathanael calls Jesus the King of Israel, maybe the one to bring political unity to the country. Then, at the very end of the passage, Jesus himself speaks. How does he refer to himself? As "the Son of Man," "upon whom the angels of God are ascending and descending." All these titles appear in a mere thirteen verses of scripture.

This wonder-struck group of people who gathered together around Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth, were all looking for different sorts of people. Yet, it was one person, Jesus, who seemed to be the common answer. We are still like those earliest disciples of Jesus. We are all following different hopes and dreams, and yet each of our individual hopes seems to have fulfillment in Jesus!

In fact, there is probably no one master image of Jesus. Each of us sees Jesus primarily, first, as a projection of what we have long been looking for.

Some of us are, indeed, looking for someone who has the power to forgive sins, to take away the sins of the world, to heal the guilt and shame we carry we in our lives. We need that Lamb of God. Others of us are looking for the One who was written about in our traditions; our very studies lead us, intellectually, to this Jesus. Some of us want a Master Teacher, a rabbi. Some of us are looking for a healer. Some of us are looking for a friend. Some of us are looking for the One who baptizes with fire and the Holy Spirit. We want to be spirited and inspired. Some of us are looking for a prophet, for a proclaimer of social justice. Some of us actually want a king!

We gather in this place, the Cathedral of St. Philip, and in other churches, because we have found the answer to our searches; we have found Jesus as Lord and Savior. But our images of this Jesus are not all the same. We see different images. My image of Jesus is not exactly the same as yours. It may be that none of us *alone* has that master image. Yet, we claim ultimately that this Jesus is the same Christ, the same Lord, to us all.

This phenomenon is the reason we can call Jesus the Savior, not just of me and my individual hopes, but the Savior of the entire world. The reason we call Jesus the savior of the world is because he does, indeed, draw the world to himself, even when the world is searching for so many different things. It is Jesus who holds us together, even when we have various images and opinions of him. How odd that Jesus beckons us with the words, "Come and see!" Because when we do come and see Jesus, we actually see very many different images.

When we do claim the courage to come and see, we discover at least two things. The first thing we see in the church is the great variety of those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ. It is a diverse group of hopes which find fulfillment in Jesus. In true Christian community, we realize that we are indeed different and diverse.

The second thing we see is Jesus. The second thing we see, in this gathered community of disciples, is a larger and more complete image of Jesus, the Christ. One of the great miracles of church life is that the identity of Jesus is gradually revealed the more we gather together, the more we speak, the more we minister to one another and to the world, the more we pray and worship. The more we do those things, the more we practice that discipleship, the more the identity of Jesus is revealed – to us and to the world. None of us has the master image of Jesus alone. The master image of Jesus is revealed only as

more and more diverse disciples gather around Jesus!

And so it is that the title Jesus most often uses for himself is “Son of Man,” “Son of Humanity,” as if Jesus truly does represent each and every one of us. Jesus truly does know the inner longings and desires of every one of us. He even knows those hopes and fears that we are unable to articulate.

Come and see, says Jesus. Come and see where he is staying. Come and see who fulfills our deepest hopes and needs. Come and see where Jesus resides. He resides in us, the saints, the crazy and diverse community of those who are called Christians, those who have responded to the call to follow. He resides in each of us, because he is the savior of each of us, and he is the savior of the world.

AMEN.

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