
Where Do We Go From Here?

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Second Sunday after the Epiphany – Year A**

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

Indeed, what are we looking for?

Even if you have no answer to that question this morning, the question itself is important: Where are you going? What are looking for?

Today, besides the Bible, I will quote three heroes of mine. One is that delightful baseball sage, Yogi Berra, who said such things as “No one goes there nowadays: it’s too crowded.” And, “You can observe a lot, just by watching.” Today, I remember one of his greatest lines: “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up some place else.”

Where are you going? What are you looking for?

The gospel passage this morning is from the last part of the first chapter of John, a fascinating chapter for me. By my count, in those last 22 verses of the chapter, there are 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.* They all, differently, describe what various people are looking for!

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. The words just all run together when we think of Jesus: he is Lord and Savior, and King and Lamb of God, and everything else. But, especially in the first century, 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.

This powerful passage of the opening chapter of the gospel of John presents 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!

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. John the Baptist was calling for repentance and looking for someone who could take away the sin. He would title that person the Lamb of God. 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 declared the next day to two of his own disciples: “Behold the Lamb of God.” But they addressed Jesus as “Rabbi” (a rather new word in those days), 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 twenty-two 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 has fulfillment in Jesus! There is probably no single, master, image of Jesus. Each of us sees Jesus primarily, first, as a projection of what we have long been looking for.

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, the Answer! 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.

I believe this phenomenon, this wild variety of hopes, is good and right. This phenomenon is the reason we can call Jesus the Savior, 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.

In this gathered community of disciples, there is a larger and more complete image of Jesus, the Christ. One of the great miracles of church life is that the larger 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 larger image of Jesus is revealed only as more and more diverse disciples gather around Jesus!

I said I would mention three heroes this morning, one being Yogi Berra. The second is William Porcher DuBose, the dean of the School of Theology, at the University of the South, in 1912, talking about the diversity of Christian truth. He said, "Truth is not an individual thing; no one of us has all of it – even all of it that is known. Truth is a corporate possession, and the knowledge of it is a corporate process." (from *Turning Points in My Life* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912), p. 56, as quoted in Donald S. Armentrout, *A DuBose Reader* (University of the South, 1984) page xxvi).

This wild gathering of various images of Jesus, various needs and identities, can seem like chaos, can't it?

And so I mention a third hero of mine today, on the weekend that so many of us to remember him, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Most of us know something about him. But I want to quote a book he particularly struggled to write. It is titled, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* He was speaking of the struggle of race relations, of where the movement should go, of violence versus non-violence, in his usual perceptive and informed way. This book reveals how capable a theologian he was.

The title of the book describes the choice we always have, when we gather with so many images and identities, so many different things we are looking for, so many different places we want to go. Ninety-Nine Names of God. Chaos or Community? That wild diversity could seem like chaos. But it can also be community. Where do we go from here? Blessed Martin's hope was we go to community, and not to chaos.

The title that Jesus uses most often 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 wide 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. As our community grows, as it grows in love and diversity, and as Jesus resides in so many diverse hopes and needs – it is then that Jesus is the savior of the whole world.

AMEN.

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