

Epiphany 3, January 19, 2020 (Jo 1:29-42; Is 49:1-7; Ps 40:1-11)

In John's gospel, the first words Jesus speaks in his public ministry reveal the thrust of the whole book. **What do you want?** he asks in the *New International Version* we use at St. John. **What are you looking for?** is the translation in the *New Revised Standard Version* at St. Stephen. **What do you want? What are you looking for?**

You probably don't spend a lot of time wondering how to find your way into the kingdom of God. In fact, I hope you don't! You know it was *God* who brought *you* into his kingdom—through your baptism—when you were *sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*.

You're already *in* the kingdom. The kingdom is all around you and within you. But what difference does it make in your life?

This gospel's first story about Jesus is a good way to focus on these questions. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his disciples: **Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**—and two of them began to follow Jesus. Jesus saw them following him and asked, **What are you looking for? What do you want?**

I ask you now the same question. When you come here to St. John/St. Stephen, or any other congregation, *what are you looking for?* Close your eyes, if you will, for about 30 seconds, and think about it.

Do you come to worship God, revealed to us in Jesus, his only Son our Lord? He is worthy of blessing and honor, glory and praise, thanksgiving and adoration. He created all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the first and last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. Do you come to worship God?

Do you come to give thanks to God? For health, and strength, and daily food? For a body that functions so miraculously, from your first breath of life to the taste buds that give delight when you eat? For the panorama of colors in nature's beauty? For the variety of animals and birds and bugs, and flowers and trees and shrubs, and people—*all* God's children? Do you come to give thanks to God?

Do you come to God for healing? When you or a loved one is ill, or injured, do you come to pray for restored health? When your heart condemns you in shame and guilt; when you suffer disappointment or frustration or fear; when memories of the past keep you from living well in the present—do you come to God for healing?

Do you come to God to grow in understanding and faith? Are you hungry to hear, to re-read, the biblical stories and texts in a new way, to grasp a new vision of what God is revealing to us in his holy Word? Are you ready to hear as an adult what you once understood as a child?

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:8-10). Do you come to God to grow in faith?

Do you come to God to be fed and nourished for the week ahead? With all the truly dreadful news of wars and hunger, sickness and poverty, natural disasters, terrorism and random acts of violence, do you come to church to regain a focus on goodness and mercy; to be reminded that God's will is for us to **do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?** (Micah 6:8) Do you come to God to be fed and nourished for the week ahead?

Do you come to God for comfort and peace? God's promises are trustworthy and true! **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? . . .**

Neither death nor life nor angels nor demons, nor the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Do you come to be reminded of this? Do you come to God for comfort and peace?

Do you come to God to be strengthened for service? Isaiah said it in today's reading: **And now the Lord says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant. . . he says, It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth (Is 49:6).** Do you come to church to learn how God is calling *you* to be a servant, to bring God's light to people who don't know his love? Do you come to God to be strengthened for service?

Do you come to God because God has commanded it? **This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps 118:24).** **I hate, I despise your religious feasts. . . but let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:21, 24).**

Do not neglect to meet together, as some have done, but encourage one another (Heb 10:25). **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (Jo 4:23).** Do you come to church to learn what these things really mean? Do you come to God because God has commanded it?

What are you looking for? What do you want? Listen to the beginning of Psalm 63: **O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. . . . Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you (Ps 63:1,3).**

Jesus' first words in John's gospel are, **What are you looking for?** The two disciples of John the Baptist ask him where he's staying, and his response is another invitation: **Come and see.**

Those words are also an invitation to *us*. *Come and see what I truly value*, says Jesus. *Come and see how God wants us to treat one another. See how I treat prostitutes and adulterers, crooks and outcasts. See how I reach out to lepers and bleeding women and foreigners. See how I forgive those who wound my spirit and my body. See how I forgive the sins of everyone you hold a grudge against. See my love for all people, at all times and in all places. See, and learn to do likewise.*

Sisters and brothers in Christ, *now* is the time! God's kingdom is here, among us, within us, around us. Repent! Change your hearts and lives, and *trust* this good news so you can live out the faith we proclaim!

Thanks be to God!