

John 1:29-42

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?"³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (NRSV)

It's amazing how a word can change what we see.

This text hinges on two seemingly innocuous questions, but in one of them is a word we don't dare overlook. First: Jesus asks: "What are you looking for?" For them, and for us as well, it's one of the central questions of life. While Jesus often called people to follow, He never accepted a volunteer with open arms; He always challenged would-be disciples to clarify their motives. It's a fair question to ask, and it's one I face. Maybe it's been a while since you thought seriously about why you're here. So: "What are you looking for?" What brings you here today? What makes being here worthwhile to you? Life's too short to not be purposeful.

The second question needs some careful unpacking. "Where are you staying?" It seems like the disciples are making small talk while they frantically try to think of something profound to say. But I think it's important, and I think I know why it's there. And it may change the way you and I think about our spiritual life.

All four Gospels tell us that Jesus' ministry began in an encounter with a radical prophet named John, somewhere along the Jordan River. Jesus was baptized by John, and the Spirit of God came upon Jesus.

By the way: the "John" in our text, and the one who wrote our text, aren't the same person. John the writer describes John the prophet as a witness to Jesus, whom he calls "the Lamb of God" and "the Son of God." The voices in the New Testament, whether those of the disciples or those of the writers, including this one, saw in Jesus God in flesh, truth wrapped in a

person, God's one unique Word; this has been the core of Christian faith for most Christians ever since.

But John the witness twice makes a shocking admission: "I myself did not know Him..." According to the Gospels, he didn't spend any significant time with Jesus at all. He'd always believed that God would send someone like Jesus; I'll bet his imagination worked overtime to envision what this person would be like. But he seems amazed at what he saw when he met Jesus.

I wonder if he felt like I have, time and time again.

I recently had the misfortune of listening to myself preach. I found a cassette—remember "cassettes"?—of a sermon I preached in 1970, part of my late father's personal goods. It was recorded when I was home for Christmas during my second year of seminary, in the church where I grew up. I was preaching in front of my family and friends, and even my fiancé (who broke the engagement a few months later—probably because of my sermon). It began with a heartwarming introduction from my father, but it quickly went downhill when I started talking. My message was simple: The church is a mess... and I, a second-year seminary student—almost a real minister—know how to fix it. As the person I am today listened to the person I was 43 years ago, I wondered why they ever ordained me! I was learning to think, to discern, and I was absorbing information like a sponge. But I latched on to ideas and formed conclusions far too quickly. I knew far less than I thought.

Like John, while I felt called to point people *toward* the truth found in Jesus, I didn't (and still don't have) any inside information. Like John, I gave witness to Someone I knew *about*, but "I myself did not know Him" then as I do now—and even now, I'm humbled by how much I have yet to learn.

Believe it or not, that's why I'm intrigued by the disciples' question: "Where are you staying?" Let me explain. Our text includes a word far richer than it sounds. When the Spirit "remains" on Jesus (verses 32 & 33); when they ask where Jesus is "staying"; and when they "remained" with Him, the same Greek word is used. And it doesn't so much refer to an address; "Meno" means: to remain, to stay, to be grounded... it's a word of *unbroken relationship*. That word is at the heart of John's understanding of faith, and will appear again and again in his Gospel. In this question, John makes it clear that they were asking: Jesus—you are our home now. Where can we put down roots next to yours? We need to know where you are grounded. They, and we, have a distinctive calling: to not merely believe, but to "remain", to put down roots in a companionship with Jesus, the living Word and presence of God. Because it takes a relationship over time, a remaining, to move beyond religious formalities to the power of being a disciple.

We are called to be witnesses—we know that. With our actions, with our words, and with our presence, we point the way to Christ so others can see Him. It's John's purpose and ours: pointing to Jesus while still learning from Him, listening for the voice of Christ at work among us, speaking honestly but graciously, trying to get out of the way so that Jesus shines through. But we too must humbly "come and see," and "remain". We do not have all the

answers. What we can have is the kind of knowing that happens over a lifetime, in a living relationship, seeking, finding, wrestling, questioning, a lover's quarrel at times, and a surrendering of our wills until we are wholly His.