**What Are You Looking For?**

**John 1:29-42**

10/12/14

Thought for Meditation:

 His [John the Baptist’s] mission was to prepare the way for Jesus, and he realized that the wasn’t the living water for anyone’s parched soul. Neither is the church, the small group, or one’s parent, pastor, mentor, or spiritual director. *Craig Barnes “Sacred Thirst” p167*

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On the main floor of the library at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary there is a desk. It is the desk Karl Barth used for 50 years, as he wrote Church Dogmatics and many other writings. For those of you who don’t know Karl Barth, he is considered the greatest theologian of the 20th century. He articulated the faith in modern terms.

Above the desk is a reproduction of a painting. It is the one that is up on the screen and on the front of your bulletin. This picture was above Barth’s desk throughout his career. The painting was by Matthias Grünewald called “The Crucifixion.” You can see that it has a picture of Jesus on the cross. On his right side are his mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the apostle John. On Jesus left side is the figure that was most important for Barth. It is John the Baptist pointing to Jesus. The figures in the painting are a bit distorted. John’s finger, that he is using to point to Jesus, is about twice as long as a normal finger should be.

The message for Barth was that John the Baptist recognized that Jesus was greater than he was. John was considered to be the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets, yet he knew that he was not the answer to the basic needs of human life. John knew that he could never satisfy the deepest longings of people, so he pointed to Jesus. His ministry was to witness to who Jesus is and what Jesus does. We see that very clearly in our passage this morning, as John encourages his own disciples to follow Jesus, the Lamb of God. Let me read our passage for you. (2:15)

**“John 1:29-42”**

* v30: John was born about 6 months before Jesus. Therefore Jesus came after him. However, John also knew that Jesus was the Son of God, who had existed from the beginning of time. Therefore he says “He came before me.”
* v31: John’s ministry was to reveal Jesus, to point to Jesus.
* v32: The gospel of John doesn’t tell the story of Jesus’ baptism. Instead, John mentions that story by talking about “the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove.”
* v36: Again, John points to Jesus.
* v37-42: This is the Word of the Lord.

John tells his own disciples to follow Jesus. As soon as they do Jesus asks them a strange question. “What are you looking for?” It can be understood several different ways. It could simply be a surface level question, “Do you need something?” A few weeks ago I was at a grocery store, looking for something – I don’t even remember what it was. What I remember was that I couldn’t find whatever I was looking for. After looking up and down several aisles I got that dazed look where everything blends together and you can’t find anything. Fortunately, a clerk saw me and recognized the glazed eyes. “Can I help you find something? What are you looking for?” Jesus question could mean that. “Can I help you? Do you need something?”

However, this question probably had a much deeper meaning. Jesus’ words often have several different levels of meaning. Jesus’ question cuts behind our defenses. His question penetrates to the core of being. “What are you looking for? What is it that you really want out of life? What is your deepest longing? What are your goals? Your hopes? Your dreams? What is it that if you found it, you could say, ‘Now I have what I need’? What are you looking for?” That is the question Jesus asks these first disciples. It is the question Jesus asks us. (7:00)

Here’s the problem – all of us have a tendency to look for things to satisfy us, things that never can or never will satisfy us. It is a form of idolatry that is part of our lives. My sister and her family go on cruises every year. When I hear her talk about their cruises I get jealous and think “I wish we could afford to take our family on trips like that. That would satisfy me.” But it wouldn’t satisfy.

Many people look for relationships with other people to satisfy them; whether it’s a teenage girl looking for just the right boy or a mom looking to her children to satisfy her – it will not work. People will always disappoint us. Some people look for the right job or for retirement from a job to satisfy. How often do we eat something or buy something, not because we are hungry or need the thing we buy, but because we are feeling empty or lonely and want the food or the thing to fill us and satisfy us? What are you really looking for? That is the question Jesus asks?

 At first glance the disciples’ response seems odd. Jesus asks them about their deepest desires, their most cherished dreams, and they respond “Where are you staying?” This question is not just about a location. In John 15 Jesus talks about being the true vine and we are the branches. He tells the disciples that they need to stay connected to the vine. “Abide in me. Stay connected to me.” The word “abide” or “stay” is the word the disciples use when they ask Jesus “Where are you staying?” In other words, they are not so much asking about the location of his house. They are on a spiritual journey. They want a relationship with Jesus. They are looking for a holy place where they can be connected to God. That is what we all want and need.

Jesus responds by saying “Come and see.” And so the disciples went with Jesus. John doesn’t tell us all the details, but they probably talked, and ate, and talked some more. The disciples began a journey of faith that fulfilled their deepest needs and longings. What they were looking for was found through a relationship with Jesus. (10:00)

 Let me share with you a few reflections from this passage. First, these verses remind us that our relationship with God is initiated by Jesus. Jesus is the one who first spoke to the disciples. Before they said anything Jesus asked what they were looking for and invited them to “Come and see.” He invited them to follow him and join him on the journey of life.

 I was raised in a Presbyterian church. In high school I had lots of questions about my faith. I understood the basic teachings of Christianity, but something was still missing. During the spring of my freshman year of college I had what I would call my spiritual awakening. It was the time I committed myself to Jesus and started growing in my faith. However, I’m convinced that long before I ever accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, Jesus was at work in my life, drawing me in to a relationship.

I’m a big C.S. Lewis fan. I’m curious, how many of you have read The Chronicles of Narnia. I love the stories. Tanya is reading the 6th book right now. In the fourth book, The Silver Chair, there is a wonderful picture of the idea that Jesus initiates our relationship.

 Aslan, the great lion and the Christ figure, has called Eustace and Jill out of our world into Narnia. They are up on a high mountain and Jill starts goofing around showing off next to a cliff. She slips and starts to fall off, so Eustace tries to save her. Jill gets back on solid ground but Eustace falls off the cliff. Aslan rushes up and blows him to wherever he is going.

 Eustace had been to Narnia before. He knew Aslan. Jill had not been there and had no idea who Aslan was. All she saw was this huge, terrifying lion. Let me read to you what happens. ***Read p18-19***

Jill and Eustace were able to get into Narnia because Aslan had first called them there. Aslan was the one who initiated the relationship. Jesus is the one who initiates our relationship with him. Long before you ever thought about Jesus he was thinking about you. He has initiated your relationship and continues to call you – “Come and see.” (15:00)

Second, notice what John the Baptist says about Jesus. Twice in our passage there is a phrase that jumps out. John says about Jesus “I didn’t know him.” If anyone should have known Jesus it was John. According to Luke they were related, maybe even cousins. There is a good possibility that they spent time together as they were growing up. John knows that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He says that Jesus ranks ahead of him, because he existed before him. John had actually baptized Jesus, and saw the dove descend down onto him. He had heard God call Jesus his beloved Son. He knew all of that, yet he also said, “I don’t know him!”

I believe this is a word of caution to all of us who claim to know Jesus. I’ve been a pastor for just over 27 years, and growing in my faith for 10 years before that. I’ve been in the church my whole life. There are times when I think that I know who Jesus is and what he is doing, or what he wants to do. But the moment I make that assumption Jesus usually does something I don’t expect, something that throws me for a loop.

I believe that one of the greatest problems in the church today, at least in the United States, is that there are too many people who assume they know Jesus and know what he wants. We know that Jesus is a Republican, or a Democrat. We know how he would vote in this next election. We know what Jesus wants us to do about global warming. We know what Jesus wants us do in the Middle East or Hong Kong. You name the issue – there are probably Christians who claim to know what Jesus wants.

All of us tend to make Jesus in our own image. We assume that he wants what we want, that our goals and ideas are the same as his goals and ideas. The moment we begin to assume that we know Jesus, what he is doing and what he wants to do, we are assuming way too much and Jesus is likely to do something that will throw us completely off balance. We must always seek Jesus and his will for our lives. But, like John, we must never assume we know, and can control, Jesus. (17:30)

 I don’t know where you are in your spiritual journey. I hope in the next few weeks and months to hear the stories of how God is working in your life. What I do know is that the only way you will be fulfilled and satisfied is through a relationship with Jesus Christ. And so I believe that the invitation that he gave to those first disciples is the same one he gives to you and me – “Come and see.” Let us together spend time with Jesus and follow him, for he alone can and will satisfy your life.