

January 15, 2023 – John 1:29-42a

I have a pet peeve. It's kind of an unusual one. Or maybe it's not. I don't know. And it's not a big deal. But I have a pet peeve about walking into a store and immediately being asked by an employee, “Can I help you find anything today?”

I know they're trying to be nice and helpful. I know there are people who really appreciate this. Who find it a mark of good customer service to be asked that question. But I don't like it.

Because it necessarily assumes that I know what I'm looking for. And sometimes I don't. Sometimes I'm looking to browse. Sometimes I just want to see what my options are. I want to compare prices and brands.

Sometimes I don't even know if the product I'm looking for even exists. Let alone whether this particular store carries it at a price I want to pay for it. “Can I help you find anything today?” No, no you can't. I don't know what I'm looking for, and I don't really want to admit that.

I wonder if that's what Andrew and the other disciple were thinking in our Gospel lesson today. Because Jesus poses to them a fairly similar question: “*What are you seeking?*” Can I help you find anything today?

The circumstances under which these two disciples meet Jesus are kind of interesting. We're familiar with John the Baptist after all. We hear all about his miraculous annunciation and birth during Luke's nativity narrative. With Zechariah foretelling his important role as a prophet of the Lord, preparing the way for the Messiah.

We hear about his work at the Jordan River, baptizing great crowds of people. We heard just last week about how he baptized Jesus. And how the heavens were opened when he did so, the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and the voice of the Father declaring, “*This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.*”

We're familiar with all these aspects of his life and ministry. But what happens next often gets overlooked. You see, John the Baptist had his own disciples. Lots of them from the sounds of it. Working alongside him at the Jordan River. Baptizing the crowds who came out just like he did.

John has been telling his disciples – and anyone else who will listen – all along that he is not the Christ. A great many people believed that he was, from the sounds of it. But he rejects that rumor. He tells them bluntly that there is one coming who is far more powerful than he is. Someone who baptizes not just with water. But with the Holy Spirit.

So when Jesus comes to be baptized and all these amazing signs happen around him – most of all the Spirit descending on him – John immediately tells all of his disciples, “This is the guy. This is who you should be following. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

“He may have shown up after me. He may even be younger than me. But he ranks before me. Because he's actually far, far older than me. He is the Son of God. I have seen him. And now you have too.”

And so the very next day, when John points Jesus out again, two of his disciples leave to follow Jesus instead. One of them is Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The other isn't named, but that's probably a clue to his identity. Because the Apostle John, who wrote this, likes to conspicuously leave himself out of his own narrative. So we'll just run with that assumption.

Andrew and the Apostle John hear John the Baptist call Jesus “the Lamb of God” and they follow him. But then Jesus does something interesting. He stops and he turns and he asks them the question I mentioned earlier: “*What are you seeking?*”

Not, “Who are you seeking?” What are you seeking? They already know who Jesus is. He's Jesus of Nazareth. He's the son of Joseph the carpenter and Mary his wife. He's John the Baptist's cousin.

And they know what John has said about him. He's the one on whom the Holy Spirit rested and remained. He's the one who John said didn't need to be baptized. He's the Lamb of God. He's the Son of God. He's the Christ, the Messiah, who is coming into the world.

That's who Jesus is. But what are they seeking? "Can I help you find anything today?" What do you expect to gain from following me? What are you seeking?

And you'll notice, they don't really answer his question. They deflect it and ask him where he's staying. Kind of like how I do when store clerks ask if they can help me with anything. Maybe the question makes them uncomfortable. Maybe they just don't know and don't want to admit it.

They do say something, though, that is interesting. Something that the Apostle John makes sure we understand. When they respond, they call him "rabbi," which John points out means "Teacher." And I wonder if that's really their answer to the question.

What are you seeking? We're seeking a teacher. We're seeking to know more about God. We're seeking to know something that John the Baptist didn't teach us. We're seeking to know more.

And that's how a great many people back then regarded Jesus. That's how a great many people today regard Jesus. He's a teacher. He's a good teacher. He's a great teacher. Almost no one on this planet who believes that Jesus actually existed thinks that he was a bad guy or an idiot. There are lots of people who think that there really was a guy named Jesus who taught some really good stuff. And that's all they think.

Just like they think there were some guys names Plato and Socrates and Aristotle who taught some really good stuff. And there were some guys named Confucius and Lao Tzu and Buddha who taught some really good stuff.

Now, Jesus was a teacher. He was a rabbi. The disciples weren't wrong to call him that. But if that really was all that they were looking for, then they could have found a good teacher in lots places.

But that's not why John the Baptist pointed to him. That's not why he sent his disciples away to become Jesus' disciples. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and then said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*"

What are you seeking? John the Baptist knew the answer: I am seeking to have my sins taken away. He said as much when Jesus came to be baptized. "*I need to be baptized by you.*" I need you to take away my sins. And you'll notice, Jesus didn't disagree with him. "*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" "You're right, John. You do need me to baptize you. You do need me to take away your sins. We'll get there. But for now, you need to baptize me."

What are you seeking? The world seeks after a teacher. Yet another teacher. To go with a long line of other teachers. All of whom are dead and buried and whose teaching came to nothing.

We don't need just another teacher. We need a Lamb sent from God, upon whom all our sins are placed. We need a Messiah, a Christ, a Savior, who takes away our sins. We need the Son of God made flesh and blood to die on a cross and rise again.

What are you seeking? I'm seeking forgiveness of my sins. I'm seeking peace with God. I'm seeking resurrection from the dead. I'm seeking eternal life. These are things you can't get from any ordinary teacher, no matter how good they are. These are the things we receive from the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

Can I help you find something today? John the Baptist helped his disciples to find that Lamb, to find Jesus. Even when they didn't know that's what they were looking for. Even when they didn't know that's what they needed.

We are called to do the same. We know who he is. We know what he gives us. And so we point to him and say, "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" The world may not know what we mean. The world may think he's just another good teacher.

But still, he will invite them to come and follow him. Come and see what he gives to them. Come and find what they are truly seeking. Amen.