

## **Sermon: What Are You Looking For?**

Year A, Second Sunday after the Epiphany

[Isaiah 49:1-7](#); [Psalm 40:1-11](#); [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#); [John 1:29-42](#)

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Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

“What are you looking for?” Vacation was a great time to reflect on what I’m looking for. I’m looking for more time to read. More time to stitch and listen to audiobooks. Less stuff in my house, in my computer, in my life. Less stuff to lug around. More surprises. I know, who would want more surprises? But the things I will remember most from my vacation are the things I didn’t expect, like playing a million games of cribbage with my sister, niece and nephew, losing practically every one, and having a blast doing it. Seeing thousands of geese migrate way overhead. Walking on a pebble beach in the last, most gorgeous sunset of the decade. Having dinner with a friend of Sarah’s in London and laughing and laughing as she became my friend too. Doing fewer things because I ought to do them and more things because I want to do them. Nothing I can’t do in my regular life. But of course, it takes a vacation to change my channels enough to realize that I need to rebalance my regular life.

“What are you looking for?” Jesus asks his new disciples (John 1:38). And because they’re new at this disciple thing, they don’t have a good answer. They’re already following him. They’ve already walked away from their regular life into a new one. Jesus isn’t going to change where he’s walking,<sup>1</sup> isn’t going to change his plan for bringing forth God’s kingdom in this world based on their answer. It’s not a focus group. So maybe it doesn’t matter that they have no idea what their answer is to that question.

I’ll give them credit. They come up with something. They ask “Where are you staying?” (John 1:38). If we all put our heads together, we could probably come up with some deeper significance. But it feels to me like it was the first thing that popped into their heads after their inner voice says, “Good question. What *am* I looking for?” Andrew spends the rest of the day with Jesus and then goes and finds his brother, Simon, who will be known as Peter or Cephas, the rock. Because he was such a solid foundation for Jesus’ ministry. Because he was that thick headed. Nicknames work for all sorts of reasons.

When Paul writes *to the church of God that is in Corinth* (1 Corinthians 1:2), he is asking essentially the same thing, “What are you looking for?” Because the Corinth church is such a hot mess, we usually vault over the beginning of the letter to get to the juicy scandals, all the factions which have divided over the lawsuits, how to conduct the Lord’s Supper, what to do about all the people speaking in tongues that no one can understand, and, of course, the charges of sexual immorality.<sup>2</sup> We think it’s pretty clear what the Corinthians want. They want to fight with each other. They want faction and division and they want to be on the side that comes out on top. They want power, backed by a higher authority.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Carter Florence, “Second Sunday after Epiphany,” in *Preaching Year A with Anna Carter Florence: Reflections on the Gospel Readings (2016-2017) Revised Common Lectionary*. (St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, 2016), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Tranvik, “Commentary on the Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9” from “Lectionary Commentaries for January 16, 2011: Second Sunday after Epiphany”, Working Preacher, [https://www.workingpreacher.org/wp\\_print\\_all.aspx?lectionary\\_calendar\\_id=180&print\\_type=comm&is\\_spanish=0](https://www.workingpreacher.org/wp_print_all.aspx?lectionary_calendar_id=180&print_type=comm&is_spanish=0) (accessed October 9, 2019).

We have all been in organizations like that. Work places, charities, churches, schools, families even. And given the energy that goes into contest for power, it's easy to lose sight of a few things. How much must the Corinthians love their God to come up with all that energy to fight? Because the church of God in Corinth is not only a minority but a shunned and stigmatized minority. The easiest thing in the world is to say, "never mind." But they don't. They stay engaged with each other, with Paul and apparently with God. That's easy to overlook.

Paul is using a standard format to start a letter. But he's using it in a way to show that he hasn't lost sight of the underlying truths in Corinth. Paul knows he was called by God to share the Good News he found in the grace and peace that comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:3). Paul knows that all who heed God's call are saints, not only in Corinth, but in every place that God calls (1 Corinthians 1:4).

Paul knows that the church of God in Corinth has been enriched in Christ, in speech and knowledge of every kind (1 Corinthians 1:5), that the testimony of Christ has been strengthened in them (1 Corinthians 1:6) and that they are not lacking in any spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 1:7). They may fight with each other in ways that really distress Paul, and he'll spend the rest of this letter and his second one trying to help them sort it out. But before he digs into the controversies, he reminds everyone that that are awash in blessings from God. And he reminds them that God isn't done with them yet, that they are still waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7)

As we, the church of God in Brookline, move into 2020, we need to ask ourselves, "What are we looking for?" It is a time of discernment for us. We too have been enriched in Christ, in speech and knowledge of every kind. We have been strengthened in the testimony of Christ. And we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. God isn't done with us yet either. And because God isn't done with us yet, we need to work together to figure out where God is calling us to go. The church building needs some significant investment to remain vital. So does the community that it houses. So does the community that surrounds it.

We need to recognize that we are on the edge of something new, something that is emerging here, something that is being born. We don't control it. It's a gift that God has given us, like so many we have been given. Jesus asked his disciples what they were looking for. And they didn't know what answer to give, except that they had already committed their feet and their time to following him. In their confusion, he said to them, "Come and see." (John 1:39). Come and see. Come and be witnesses. Come and be witnesses to what God is doing in this world, what God is doing in you and in your life. Come and see what is surprising and new. Come and see what is already happening that you never even noticed. Come and see what new friendships break out, what fellowships develop around trying something and not being 1000% successful at it. Come and see what it is like to carry some parts of your old life forward and leave some of your old life behind. Come and see what it is like to stop doing some of the things you think you ought to do and do more of the things that remind you of your joy. Come and see what it is like to work on a kingdom project that is bigger than you, that requires gifts you're only barely aware you have. Come and see the rock solid, thick witted people that God will use in the kingdom project. Come and see what it is like to take the next step in answering the call God sent you. Come and see what it is like to tell others that you have found the Messiah and it was just what you were looking for.