

EPIPHANY 2, Jan. 15, 2017, Year A

"... "Look, here is the Lamb of God!..." (from John 1:29-42)

- "Come... and see!" God *invites us*, and God *reveals to us*. *Why, then*, do we so often think that religious activity, and spiritual practice, involve *searching for* God? We *look* for God, for a deeper knowledge and experience of God.¹ We are *seekers*, and God is *whom* we seek. If we succeed, we become *finders*, and God becomes the one whom we *find*. This is how we can describe those who went out to John the Baptizer in the wilderness. Surely some of them went out to spy and gather evidence against him. But *others were seekers*. No longer *finding the way* in the Temple at Jerusalem, many went into the wilderness around the Jordan River to see and *hear* the prophet. *Seeking, they hoped to find*.
- John *could have* fooled himself into thinking that *he* was the *object* of interest. As gratifying as that might have been, it would have been *fatal* for his soul and to his calling. *God's people were looking for God*, for a Word from God, and for a deeper sense of God's presence. John, being faithful to the Word he had received, *pointed not to himself but beyond*. John pointed to *the One who had found him*. He pointed to "the true Light, which enlightens everyone, ...coming into the world."² When "John saw Jesus coming toward him [he] declared, '*Here* is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"³ John did not say, "*seek* the Lamb of God", or "*look* for the Lamb of God." He said, *here is the Lamb of God - the one who erases the perceived distance between us and God*. Through John's ministry, God *invites us* and God *reveals to us*.
- To approach Christian faith *like the searchers* who went out to John, and regard faith as *a search to find*, at first *makes sense*. The world around us encourages us to "*be in the driver's seat*" - to try and *direct* our experience and perception. *Many religions appear to involve a human search for the divine*. But to think of our approach to God through Jesus *in this way*, is to misunderstand what our faith is about. Notice how we typically speak about "*searching for*" and "*finding God*." But, of course, this is *misleading*. For *God is not lost! We are the ones who are lost!* Yet, *we are not lost from God*; we are only lost *from ourselves*.

- Jesus says, “**Come and see!**” This is a very *different* message from “*look and find*,” though it may sound the same. *An encouragement to explore differs from an invitation to receive.* Instead of us reaching out because of our interest to find God, God *grabs our attention* and gives us *insight, vision and perception*. And God does this in the context of an unfolding relationship. *We don’t have relationships with things or objects; we have relationships with persons, who are fellow subjects.* We can have no real mutuality with a *thing*. But, through Jesus, God draws us into a relationship involving communication and accountability.
- Our relationship with God through Christ, in the Spirit, is *not about finding*; it is about *being found*. The discovery we make is *not something we attain* for ourselves. So, it’s not a matter of looking for God, and then finding God. Instead, *we find that we have been found by this great Other, who has been with us all along.*
- “*Listen to me, O coastlands,” says the Lord through the prophet Isaiah; “pay attention, you peoples from far away!”⁴ Isaiah speaks words *God has revealed to him*, about his vocation. “The Lord called me before I was born,” he says; “while I was in my mother’s womb he named me... And [the Lord] said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’” Isaiah is speaking about *being found* by God, being *named* by God, and *receiving* a vocation from God. As we noticed last Sunday, God calls the prophet to *receive* and embody *Israel’s vocation*. It is the vocation fulfilled later by Jesus, precisely so that every one of us can receive and live into it, as well. *God said through Isaiah*, “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” And so we should not be surprised when *Jesus later tells us that we “are the light of the world”!*⁵*
- As we heard, John the Baptizer says to two of his disciples, “*Look, here is the Lamb of God.*” Seeing Jesus, the two follow him on The Way. Noting how they are preoccupied with searching, Jesus asks them, “*What are you looking for?*” Perhaps he means to clarify the *futility* of their search, because *there is nothing*

left for them to 'find.' For they have been found. Immediately, they say, "*Rabbi* / teacher," an exclamation of *recognition*. Like us, they want to be with him, and remain with him. When they ask him where he is staying, he does not give them directions. He simply says, "*Come and see.*" And when Andrew brings his brother to Jesus, *Jesus already knows who he is*. He says, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)."

- In our Epistle, Paul writes to people who may have been just like us ~ baptized, but perhaps not fully sure of who they were or where they stood in the world. Paul writes to them with conviction:⁶ "I give *thanks* to my God *always* for you because of *the grace of God that has been given to you in Christ Jesus...*" Paul doesn't say he *hopes* they *might* receive grace; instead, he refers to what has *already been given* to them, and to us. And so, in every way, *we have been enriched* in Christ Jesus, *so that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift* as we await for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Even though we don't yet *fully* see, as we shall one day, *we have received revelation; we have been given insight; we have been filled with grace*. Like the two disciples, we don't need to search because there's nothing for us to 'find.' For we have already *been found!*
- Yet, we think of ourselves as seekers. We imagine that we are *looking* for God and for a deeper knowledge of the divine. But *God already knows who we are, and better than we know ourselves*. God knows our true identity, which comes to wholeness when we live into our *received* vocation as the Lord's followers.
- One reason we are seekers who are striving to find answers is because we live in a world that constantly challenges us to be *sure* about what we *know*. But that's not the point. *The point is who we know, not what we know*. And the most important 'who' we know, is *the One who has found us*, and who knows us better than we know ourselves. Our Gospel today shows us that we don't need to go *into the wilderness* to find the Messiah. We have already been baptized in the Red Sea and the Jordan, into the One who has found us and *has always been with us*. *Behold! Here is the Lamb of God! Here*, in and among his called

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and baptized people, is the One who has bridged our separation from God.
"Happy are they who trust in the Lord!"⁸



St John the Baptizer, Netherlandish, ca 1500

John 1:29-42

John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 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.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 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?” 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). 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).

Notes:

¹ See the third petition in Form II of the Prayers of the People, page 386 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, which refers to “all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him.” This intercession continues with the following bidding: “Prayer that they may find and be found by him.” A more appropriate way of phrasing this petition would be to say, “pray that they may *experience* finding and being found by him.”

² See John 1:9. Our Collect for this day also refers to the Light of the World.

³ See John 1:29-42, our Gospel for today, for this and subsequent quotes.

⁴ For this and the following, see Is 49:1-7, our first reading.

⁵ See Matthew 5:14ff.

⁶ See 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, our Epistle reading, for the following.

⁷ A paraphrase of Paul’s words.

⁸ Ps 40:4, from our Psalm.