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## What do you seek

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# What Do You Seek?<sup>1</sup>

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*Text: John 1:29–41*

Excuse me for being so bold, but could you tell me why you're here today? What is it you're hoping for? What do you seek?

One day, many years ago, Jesus asked two of John's disciples that very same question: "What do you seek?" They didn't have an answer right away. Neither did we who were standing there watching—but it did set us to thinking. What *did* we want from this One called Jesus?

I'll never forget that day in Bethany! That's where I live, by the way. It's a small town on the east side of the Jordan river, not very far from Jerusalem. John had been in our community for several days, baptizing many as a sign of repentance and speaking about Someone coming who was greater than he... Someone who existed even before John was born, he said. I don't mind telling you, we were all really puzzled by his words. So were the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, it seems. They sent representatives to question him about his baptizing and his teaching...And the one question they asked over and over again was "Who are you?"

"Are you the Messiah?"

"No."

"Are you Elijah?"

"No!"

"Well, then, who are you?"

And finally John answered, "I am the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!"

The very next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and he called out in a loud voice for all to hear, "There's the One I was talking about—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit!"

And the day after that—the day I remember so well—while John was standing with two of his disciples, Jesus walked by again, and once again John said, "Behold the Lamb of God". While my head struggled with the possible meaning of those strange words "Lamb of God", my eyes saw John's disciples setting out to follow Jesus. I watched Jesus turn around... and I heard Jesus ask, "What do you seek?"

The disciples didn't answer—didn't even attempt one! It was as if they hadn't even heard the question. Instead, they asked Jesus a question of their own, "Rabbi (that means, 'teacher') where are you staying?" "Come and see," he said. And before I knew it, off went Jesus with John's disciples and we were left with that question sort of hanging in the air, "What do you seek?"

I've often wondered what Jesus said to those two that day—or what he did—because the next thing I heard from others was that Andrew, one of the two who went with Jesus, came back, found his brother, Peter, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah!"

The Messiah! Jesus—the Messiah! Could it really be? I could feel the excitement rising within me. My heart was pounding! Our people had been waiting so long for the Anointed One—the Messiah—who would free us from Roman control and oppression. We longed to be free, to make our own decisions, run our country the way we wanted to. That, for sure, was one thing we were seeking—political freedom!

Maybe you've heard some of what happened next. So you know that political freedom was not Jesus' main concern. No way! Many people were disappointed by that... So disappointed that they persuaded the Roman authorities to do away with him..., but not before some of us began to discover what Jesus has to offer..., what it was we so desperately *needed*—what it was we were *really* seeking in our Messiah.

Let me refresh your memories with a few of our stories:

Zacchaeus. You remember him, don't you? A very short man—chief tax collector for the Romans. Often took more

money than required and kept the extra. We really hated people like him! Oh, how we hated them! But not Jesus! His response was just the opposite. He saw Zacchaeus up in that sycamore tree where he had climbed to get a good look, beckoned to him and said, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus! I'm coming to your house today!"

Can you believe that? A greedy and dishonest man, curious about Jesus, wanting just to see him, and discovering that Jesus offered *acceptance* and *belonging*.

Is that perhaps what you seek?

And the woman caught in the very act of adultery. Do you remember her too? The Pharisees dragged her right into the Temple where Jesus was teaching, reminded him of the law and said she should be stoned and asked, "Now what do *you* say?" According to the reports, Jesus wrote something on the ground, then looked up and answered, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." And what do you know! One by one, they all left, leaving Jesus and the woman alone. "Is there no one left to condemn you?" he asked. "No one," she answered. "Well, then, I do not condemn you either."

Can you believe that? A sinful woman, who expected punishment, and received *forgiveness*.

Is that perhaps what you seek?

And what about: Mary of Magdala possessed by seven demons? the ten lepers? the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years? the boy afflicted with seizures? blind Bartimaeus? The list could go on and on.

Can you believe that? So many who were sick and suffering both mentally and physically, so many who were feeling helpless and hopeless, coming to Jesus and being healed of their infirmities. All of them *healed* and made *whole*!

Is that perhaps what you seek?

And then there was Peter... big, strong, exuberant, confident Peter—a fisherman by trade—but then a disciple of Jesus, thanks to Andrew's invitation. A boisterous fellow he was! And something of a braggart, I might add. Peter was one of the first to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah... Claimed he'd be faithful to Jesus no matter what... but then when the chips

were down and the pressure just too much, the ultimate denial. You remember that night in the courtyard, don't you? "I never knew the man," he said, and repeated that three times. And then broke down and wept. But that wasn't the end of the relationship. After Jesus rose from the dead, he sought Peter out one morning at the seashore and gave him another chance: three times the same question, "Do you love me, Peter?" and three times the answer, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And three times, the directive, "Take care of my sheep."

Can you believe that? A man despondent and discouraged, ashamed of his own behaviour, not knowing where to go and what to do—sought out by Jesus and given new *purpose* and *direction* for his life.

Is that perhaps what you seek?

I could talk on and on. I'd really like to tell you more. But maybe it's enough that I just set your minds to thinking a bit. And just before I go, let me reassure you. I'm not a mind reader. I have no way of knowing why you're here today. But of this I am certain:

If you're looking for

the One who offers acceptance and belonging

the One always ready to forgive

the One with power to heal

the One who can give new purpose and direction for your life:

then you've come to the right place!

Because it's *here*, as you gather together, that Jesus, the Messiah—the Anointed One—comes in Word and Sacrament and claims you as his own.

Oh! And by the way! When you do experience the love of Jesus in your life, *respond* with gratitude, and share *your* story with someone else. You'll be glad you did!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This sermon is a dramatic monologue intended to be done without script. I wore a biblical costume and began by walking down the aisle in silence, looking intently into the faces of persons in the congregation.