

“What are you looking for?”
 Reading from the Old Testament: Amos 5:14-15
 Reading from the Gospels: John 1:35-42

For all the security concerns hovering over our use of those smart little rectangular demigods that lord over our lives; for all the fears about the theft and use of our personal data, understandable fears about a real and present danger; it has not curbed our willingness to treat our personal phone calls like open mic night at the neighborhood bar. Why, just in a trip to Target you may become the unsolicited witness to a crumbling marriage, a stranger’s description of his phlebitis, and a parent’s tirade about teacher workdays. You don’t need to DVR *The Guiding Light*, just walk across a parking lot.

In this week’s episode, the theme was kitchen makeover madness. She was stressed, vexed, and on the cusp of being miffed as she passed me, marching with workout intensity into the Morrison Y. The planets called convenience were not aligning with the contractor/decorator on the other end of the conversation, and so a request was evolving into a plea! You must, you should, you are duty bound to make it convenient for me to see an installed model of the ... farmhouse sink! Lives and colanders and the hope for envious neighbors are depending on it!

It's ... a ... sink ... that you will probably pine to replace as soon as turquoise returns to the style magazines. What's the end game here? An obituary that reads, *He is survived by a wife, two children, and a deliciously stylish farmhouse sink.* That's some epitaph!

"What are you looking for?" The first words from the mouth of Jesus in John's gospel form a question, and coming from the lips of Jesus, it knifes through flesh and bone, probing straight into the heart of your heart.

"What are you looking for?" I don't mean to make light of a person trying to make an informed and wise investment in her home, a style choice that brings pleasure. Certainly, most folks reside on the *frequent* end of *occasionally* when it comes to majoring in the minors, obsessing over purchases that could never be as critical to a full life as we make them out to be.

Nobody in my family enjoys shopping with me because it takes me a little too long to make a decision. The trauma of choice. The torturous journey between options and purchase, between the inner debate and the voiced decision. Is it the right size? Is the material abrasive? Will it

actually match the shoes? Go on sale tomorrow? I'm not sure if I'm ready but will it still be here when I can come back next Friday?

What are you looking for? Even if you think you know what you are looking for, you are going from place to place to place: That's not it ... That's not the right one ... Good Lord, that's not it ... Nope ... Uh-uh ... not even close. And when you find the right one, are you sure it's the right one of the right ones? You're sifting through the rack or stack: The stitch is coming loose on this one; This one has a stain or dent on it. Do you have one in a in an unopened box, i.e. is not a floor sample? Such angst, yet so often it is wasted on things far removed from what is essential to a full life. Metaphorically, how much of life is spent in the anxiety between the farmhouse sink and turquoise, the disquiet between grasping what you want and wanting what's next?

What are you looking for? Do our lives reflect an answer to the question or an evasion of the answer? The day after Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist is hanging out with a couple of his own disciples. The location's a bit murky. Is John the Baptist, like SNL's Chris Farley, "living in a van down by the river," or has the scene moved to a nearby encampment or maybe a Jerusalem suburb? You get the sense that they

are in the midst of some kind of active village, watching the townsfolk going about their daily lives, when Jesus just happens to be walking by. Seeing this brings John to attention, exclaiming, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” It comes across as sort of a celebrity sighting. I remember being at lunch during a Presbytery meeting. A man walked by my table and I looked up and up and up. He sat down and still, I looked up and up. It suddenly dawned on me, “That’s Tommy Burleson, legend of Wolfpack basketball lore, all 7’4” of him.” I had heard he was a Presbyterian elder, but to actually see him. I immediately whispered to my colleague, “You know who that is?” Wow!

As John watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" Now, John the Baptist is saying this to two of his own disciples, and yet the text reports, “The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” That sounds rather fickle, like the social climber who drops you mid-sentence to chase after the more popular peer; or maybe the street in Eastover where drivers consistently have to dodge the construction trucks there to renovate the kitchen they remodeled 2 yrs. ago. I’m guessing there are a lot of farmhouse sinks

being installed in places that would never, ever be mistaken for a farmhouse.

“The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” Is that what is happening here? Fleeting fan hopscotch? Fad pilgrims? “Sorry John, but Jesus is what’s trending now.” At this point, neither we nor John the Baptist can say what motivates them, but as is true with every fledgling disciple of any person, idea, trend, or team, those motivations are well-mixed. However, the brief, seemingly innocuous exchange that takes place when Jesus notices the pair following him is actually central to the meaning of life itself.

"What are you looking for?" They answered with their own question, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see."

What are you looking for? Where are you staying? Come and See!

Simple exchange. Massive theological import and meaning. “What are you looking for?” Jesus’ question is ***THE*** existential question that greets your every dawning day. “Where are you staying.” The seekers’ question is ***THE*** fundamental human yearning for connection. “Come

and see!” Jesus’ answer is ***THE*** place where those two questions merge and redemption is found.

Is it true that shoppers can be divided into two distinct categories – 1) Those who love it -----and----- 2) Those who hate it? When I asked that question in our Bible study this week, one immediate response was, “It depends on what you’re shopping for.” And I thought ... *Yeah* ... I mean, I have about as much interest in a flea market as I have in a roach convention, but I remember as a kid going with my father to Boyd’s men’s store in St. Louis, and I’d run over to the shoe section because they carried the Puma Clyde, named after basketball legend Walt “Clyde” Frazier, not the best player in the league, but certainly the coolest at the time, and those were the coolest shoes. I’d hold that shoe and think ... someday!

When you enter a store, a good store, no matter the product, an employee will approach you with the question, “Can I help you find what you are looking for.” Now, that’s a tough question for an introvert, because you want the help when you have a question, but until then you just want them to back off. Yet, isn’t that the question we pose here week after week? Can we help you find what you’re looking for? A good

percentage of the time the answer we get back is the same answer I give to the clerk at Belk's: *Just looking, thanks*. Sometimes, in the work of the church, we feel like those pop-up ads that you play whack-a-mole with when shopping online: *Hi, I'm Kristy, sales associate for Salespitch Subaru, Big Rock Jewelers, Deep Pockets Furniture, and I'm here to assist you and answer any questions. Let's chat!* They keep popping up, *Hi! Hi! Hi!* Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack.

Yet, we are all looking whether we'll admit it or not. We seek, we yearn, we dream, we covet, we try it out or try it on, we experiment, we regret, we return it, and we go out again to follow the next thing. We're all looking, and in some way, we're asking the same question of those two first disciples, "Where are you staying?" The word translated *staying* can also be translated as: abide, dwell, live. Where do you abide? Where do you dwell? Where can I find you? Be with you? Come to know you? Experience your presence? Jesus, if you are the Word made flesh, the author of forgiveness and mercy, the light for our paths, the redeemer of the world; if you're all that, then where you are is where we want, we need to be. As with the two disciples, we are looking for connection, relationship, meaning, purpose, life.

And what does Jesus say? “Come and see.”

Jesus, prayer, scripture, worship, sermon, sacrament, service, generosity, connection, fellowship - church. Too often, we’re playing whack-a-mole with the very things that foster the connection to the One we seek - the meaning, mission, connection, relationship, and purpose that are uniquely available in the community of faith. At some level we are those disciples asking that question, and week after week as we gather as a community of faith, we’re shouting Jesus’ answer, Come and see!

Consider the first thing we say here as we gather: The Lord be with you ... And also with you.” The Psalmist proclaims, “The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.” Jesus declares, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

“Rabbi, where are you staying?” “Come and see!” The Lord be with you... Amen.