

Sermon for The 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Date: January 20, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 49:1-7

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Gospel Reading: John 1:29-42

Sermon Text: John 1:29-42

Sermon Title: What Do You Want?

Introit: Psalm 19:1-4; Antiphon Psalm 19:14

Hymns:

LSB 593 – See This Wonder in the Making

LSB 398 – Hail to the Lord's Anointed

LSB 781 – We Give Thee But Thine Own (v.1-2)

LSB 702 – My Faith Looks Up to Thee

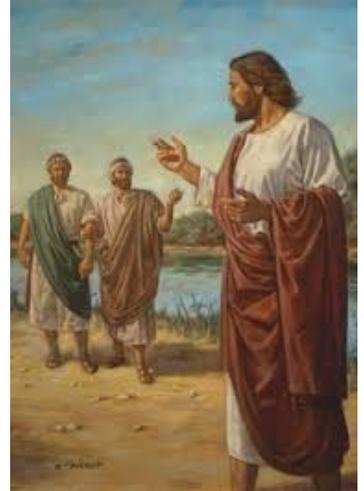
Distribution:

LSB 822 – Alleluia! Let Praises Ring

LSB 394 – Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 203



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Text: John 1:29-42

John saw Jesus coming toward him the next day and said, “Look! This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘A man who comes after me was before me because he existed before I did.’ I didn’t know who he was. However, I came to baptize with water to show him to the people of Israel.”

John said, “I saw the Spirit come down as a dove from heaven and stay on him. I didn’t know who he was. But God, who sent me to baptize with water, had told me, ‘When you see the Spirit come down and stay on someone, you’ll know that person is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen this and have declared that this is the Son of God.”

The next day John was standing with two of his disciples. John saw Jesus walk by. John said, “Look! This is the Lamb of God.” When the two disciples heard John say this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus turned around and saw them following him. He asked them, “What are you looking for?”

They said to him, “Rabbi” (which means “teacher”), “where are you staying?”

Jesus told them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went to see where he was staying and spent the rest of that day with him. It was about ten o’clock in the morning.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two disciples who heard John and followed Jesus. Andrew at once found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”). Andrew brought Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at Simon and said, “You are Simon, son of John. Your name will be Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

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Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

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Grace, peace, and mercy be given to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

What do you want?

There was a kindergarten teacher who asked her class what each student would like to be when they grew up. Most of the answers she received were the standards for your basics 5 year old munchkin in kindergarten. “I want to be a fireman.” “... a policeman.” “... a nurse.” “... the president.” “I want to be a teacher.” That last one warmed her heart.

Then she got to little Johnny. Johnny was always good for an answer. Sometimes a good answer, but always an answer. “Johnny what do you want to be when you grow up?”

Johnny responded, “Possible.”

That answer threw her a little bit but only a little. Kindergarten teachers are far more difficult to shock than most people would give them credit. If most people knew all the stuff little children told their kindergarten teacher they’d require FBI background checks and top secret security clearances to hold the office. Showing no outward sign of dismay, the teacher asked, “What do you mean you want to be ‘possible’?”

Johnny was quick to respond, “Mommy always says I’m impossible! When I grow up I want to be possible.”

So let me ask you a question. What do you want? Not necessarily when you grow up. We’re all always in various stages of getting ‘grown up.’ What do you want? I mean, what do you really want more than anything else? If a machine existed that could be hooked up to your brain and give a print out of everything you were thinking, what is the one thing would show up again and again? What is the longing of your heart? Would you be longing for love, searching for security, relishing in the thought that you might become someone remember-able? Would you be hoping to get the debts paid off, get the kids through college, or is there some other pressing point of persistence that plagues your mind?

I suppose there are as many answers to that question as there are people. It’s a question we all have to answer, if for no one else, at least for ourselves, from time to time. It’s a question that has been asked often throughout the ages. About 2000 years ago, Jesus asked that question of two men who were following Him. Jesus came to the place where John the Baptist was baptizing – as his job description aptly described.

That wasn’t, in and of itself, all that strange. Great numbers of people had been heading out into the countryside to see John the Baptist baptize. Had that event happened in our own age I suppose there would have been hot dog vendors, beer vendors, and t-shirt vendors selling shirts that said, “I survived John in the Jordan.”

Most of the people going out to see John were intrigued by his message and his call to repentance. John’s message changed people’s hearts. It caused them to see their need for change in the way they were thinking and acting. John had a good affect on most folks. One day, not entirely unlike any other day, Jesus shows up. Jesus had not yet done any miracles. He had not yet begun to preach or teach. He had not yet begun to tell everyone that He was the Messiah,

the Savior of the whole world. To everyone in the crowd, Jesus would have looked like any other man heading out to see John. John, however, knew Jesus. He knew Jesus was the One for whom he had been called to prepare the way.¹ John's job was to get people ready to hear Jesus. John knew Jesus was the Savior of the world.

Now John was a tough guy. He didn't get shocked or excited too easily, but when he saw Jesus he could not contain himself. He shouted out for all to hear, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" Now that would have caused people to look. Remember John's message was, "Repent and be forgiven. Have your sins taken away. Be baptized." Then John points to a man and says, "That man takes sins away."

The imagery John used was very familiar to those people. They knew about the daily sacrifice for the people. A perfect lamb without blemish or spot. When John says, "Behold the Lamb of God..." They knew this was particularly important. Everyone would have looked to see who John was talking about, who John was pointing at.

Though Jesus probably didn't look like much, John had just given Him a whole bunch of public notoriety. The people were looking for the Messiah. They wanted, need, Him to come. Now, John, a reputable man in the community, had just pointed Him out. That night I'm sure Jesus was the talk around many dinner tables. Then next day it happens all over again. Jesus walks by where John is baptizing and John shouts it out again, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

Without comment or question two of John's students follow Jesus. They need to know more about this man John held in such high regard. They follow Him for a time, but keep their distance behind Him, but they say nothing. They just walk behind Jesus. After a while Jesus turns to them and asks, "What do you want?" It was not a question asked in confrontation like, "What's your problem, why are you following me?" It was just a simple open-ended question. "What do you want?"

When I read these words, I find myself standing in the shoes of those two men. I think about what it would have been like to have Jesus looking at me and talking to me, asking me that question. It should have been a simple question to answer. They followed Him for a reason, and they should have been easily able to explain it, but it wasn't. They hesitated. They didn't know what to say.

I suppose you might too if Author-of-life-and-all-that-is asked you, "What do you want?" After all, this is Jesus. He is the all-knowing, all-powerful, Son of God. He is the Author, and Savior, of Life – your life. This is One who knows what you're thinking in your mind, knows what you're feeling in your heart. He would know, and you would know that He would know, if you were just trying to impress Him. He would know if you were trying to feed Him a line, bamboozle or flim-flam Him. He would know if you were giving Him an answer that was anything less than completely truthful. He would know! Maybe that's why those two men hesitated, because there, in Jesus' eyes, they saw God looking back at them. You would hesitate too, and maybe that would be the best thing to do. Pause, stop, think about how to answer.

¹ Matthew 3:3

After all, you have far more than they did. The men who were following Jesus had only the words of John the Baptist. You, on the other hand, have access to four different writers of the four Gospels in the Bible, all of whom told the story of Jesus' birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. You can read how Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies which had been made to identify the coming Savior. You can read how Jesus, the Son of God, had power to heal diseases. Jesus never encountered any illness which proved immune, or resistant, to His ability to heal. Even death had to release its captives, when Jesus gave the command. In God's Holy Word, you can meet a Savior who gave His earthly life so that you could have eternal life. In those pages, you can walk as a silent, unseen, spectator, a fly on the wall, and watch how Jesus loved those who were rejected by the rest of society. You could scan, through the Bible, watch how He embraced those who were outcasts; how He listened to those whose voices had been ignored. You can read just how much Jesus cared.

That's why when Jesus, who has the power to still a storm with a sentence, who has the ability to restore a severed ear with a touch, who can feed thousands of hungry followers with a young boy's lunch... That's why when He asks you, "What do you want?" you would do well to give your answer some thought. Think about it. Take your time. There is nothing you could ever want which He cannot give you. Anything. Everything. The possibilities are overwhelmingly limitless!

Have I got you thinking? Is your mind starting to ponder? Are your thoughts roaming with the possibilities?

There is a question that is presented in many tales of adventure, which include a genie in a lamp, if you were given three wishes, what would you ask for. I've thought about that question a lot, and I know exactly what I would ask for from the genie. The very first thing out of my mouth would be, "I wish for an infinite number of wishes that will all be granted as I desire them to be, not in ways that twist my meaning or intent."

You see my answer would, for all time enslave the genie to my whims and my will. The problem is, here when Jesus asks that question, I, and I hope all of you, are not so foolish as to think you can trap God Almighty with your catchy answer. When the One asking the question is real, and can really grant all that you ask, that will get you thinking.

You could answer all sorts of things. Do I want a long life? Maybe that's not enough. Perhaps you'd better ask for a healthy, long life. But that's not much good if you don't have the wherewithal to enjoy the healthy, long life. You'd better make it a healthy, long life with a lot of money. But if the market crashes, having a lot of money may not help much. So let's make it a healthy, long life with a lot of money and a steady economy. Of course, if you stop there, you might end up being a healthy, rich, long-living, lonely person. you'd better include asking for some companionship. So, now our answer is, "Jesus, I want to be rich, live a long life, with health, and in a world that has a steady economy, surrounded by good companions, and a loving spouse."

Maybe trying to find the right answer that covers all the bases, which leaves no possibility for error is daunting. There is always something you could forget, some loophole that needs to

be plugged, some unanticipated trouble which would reduce your well thought-out plans to trial and tribulation.

Because of sin, because this world is not a nice place, we can plan, but we can never be sure that we have taken care of every possible contingency. We don't have the ability to create a perfect life, no matter how hard we try. At this point, I can almost hear you say, "Hold on there now Pastor. Don't you kid yourself. I know what I want. I know exactly what I'd say to Jesus. And I wouldn't have any second guessing about it"

To which I might say, "Are you sure?" I've met several people who searched, and worked, for a financial fortune, and when they found they had everything money could buy, they also found they had not bought anything which made them happy. I've read, and I'm sure you have too, about the stars of stage and screen who, although the world was at their feet, got caught up in self-destructive behavior. Those stars were shooting stars, that burn themselves out as they plummet to the earth. We've seen the lust for power which motivates so many rulers, dictators, and despots, and sometimes not so evil people, that we ourselves have elected. We've all watched power corrupt. So, "What do you want?" Happiness? Peace? Contentment? Joy? How do you wish for those, and really get what your really want?

I once heard about a pastor who asked a little girl whether she wanted a baby brother or a baby sister. Apparently the little girl's father and mother, who was still about two months away from delivery, had spent some time discussing the possibilities with their daughter. Her reply to the pastor's question was given with a sigh and a tone that said the preacher, who had asked such a silly question, might be just a little bit slow. The little girl said, "Pastor, sometimes you just gotta take what God gives you." That was actually a pretty profound answer, wasn't it?

So, we left the men who were following Jesus a few minutes back. When we left them, they had not yet given their answer. Let's go back and see what they said to Jesus' question. You'll never guess what it was. If I gave you a million years, and as many tries each hour, you couldn't guess how they answer Jesus.

Jesus asked, "What do you want?" and the men replied, "Ah, Teacher, where are you staying?²"

That's it. That's what they said. "Where are you staying?" "Where are you staying?!" That's all they could come up with? They wanted to know where Jesus was spending the night? It's not what you would have said. It's not what I would have said. But that is what they said. So Jesus said, "Come on along and see."³

You know those men did go along, and they did see. They saw Jesus share the heavenly Father's love with endless thousands of sinners.⁴ They saw Jesus calm storms,⁵ walk on water,⁶ and even turn water into wine.⁷ They heard Jesus put down those who were overly proud,⁸ and

2 John 1:38

3 John 1:39

4 Matthew 14:13-21

5 Mark 4:35-41

6 Mark 6:45-52

7 John 2:1-12

8 Mat 23

lift up those who were crushed down by guilt.⁹ They saw Jesus raise those who were dead in body¹⁰ and soul.¹¹ And they also saw Jesus arrested.¹² They saw Him condemned,¹³ and they knew He died on the cross.¹⁴ Some of them watched it happen.

They also saw an empty tomb;¹⁵ they saw Jesus' burial clothes left in the grave nicely folded.¹⁶ They saw a living Jesus, and they had the opportunity to listen to Him, and eat with Him,¹⁷ and if they had chosen, to touch Him.¹⁸ They saw Jesus ascend into Heaven,¹⁹ and they saw the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost with wind and fire.²⁰

That day the Church was born, and they talked about the things they had seen. They shared how Jesus had the ability to forgive sins, to snatch souls from the fires of Hell. They shared how Jesus cared when no one else was concerned; how Jesus would listen, even when everybody else had tuned you away; how Jesus would be with you, when family and friends had failed you. They shared that Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Now, "What do you want?" Do you want a long life? Jesus gives you eternity. Do you want to be rich? He can take you to a place where money is meaningless, and gold is used for paving the streets. Do you want to be surrounded by people who care for you? Heaven is filled with such souls. Do you want freedom? Jesus died to grant you freedom from sin, death, and the power of the devil. All the things that we want, all the things that are deep within us, Jesus knows about, and supplies.

That's why when people seem unsatisfied with life, when they seem to be searching without ever finding, seeking without finishing, when they seem to be unsure and unhappy about what they want, the Church has said, "Come and see Jesus."

When that question hits you, "What do you want?" 'Jesus' should be at the top of the list. Come and see Him/. Come and meet Him. Today He invites you to see the greatest love you will ever encounter. He offers you the greatest gift you could ever receive. He invites you into His family, into His home, into a peace that surpasses all human understanding. If you need to know more come and hear the word of God. There, you will meet Jesus who is everything you could ever really want.

...

There was a little boy who loved his father very much. He wanted to be around his dad 24/7. The boy tried to walk like his dad; talk like his dad; laugh like his dad; be like his dad. He was dad's second shadow.

9 Matthew 5:1-12

10 John 11:1-44

11 John 8:1-11

12 Luke 22:47-53

13 Luke 23:18:25

14 Luke 23:44-49

15 Luke 24:1-12

16 Luke 24:12

17 Luke 24:36-49

18 Luke 24:39

19 Luke 24:50-52

20 Acts 2:1-4

One day, when dad was working in his home, the boy came in and stood silently next to his father. The boy didn't say anything, he just watched his dad. Dad looked up at his son. The son looked at his dad. After a few minutes, dad looked again; the son hadn't blinked. Finally, in order to break the boy's unshakable gaze, dad asked, "Well, my little man, what do you want?"

"Nothing, dad," came back the reply, "I just want to be near you." It's a good reply. It's probably the best one you can give to Jesus who asks, "What do you want?"

May God grant your answer would be, "I want nothing more, dear Savior, than just to be near You." Amen.