**Weekend of Sunday, January 15, 2022**

**2nd Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 2/Year A**

**First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-7**

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**Gospel Reading: John 1:29-42**

**Sermon Title: *“What are you Looking For?”***

**Theme:**

*Today’s gospel opens with further reflection on Jesus’ baptism. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the one anointed by the Spirit. In the liturgy we come and see Christ revealed among us in word and meal. We go forth to invite others to come and worship the Holy One and to receive the gifts of grace and peace made known among us.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-7**

 1Listen to me, O coastlands,
  pay attention, you peoples from far away!
 The Lord called me before I was born,
  while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.
 2He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
  in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
 he made me a polished arrow,
  in his quiver he hid me away.
 3And he said to me, “You are my servant,
  Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”
 4But I said, “I have labored in vain,
  I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
 yet surely my cause is with the Lord,
  and my reward with my God.”

 5And now the Lord says,
  who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
 to bring Jacob back to him,
  and that Israel might be gathered to him,
 for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
  and my God has become my strength—
 6he says,
 “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
  to raise up the tribes of Jacob
  and to restore the survivors of Israel;
 I will give you as a light to the nations,
  that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

 7Thus says the Lord,
  the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
 to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
  the slave of rulers,
 “Kings shall see and stand up,
  princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
 because of the Lord, who is faithful,
  the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

1Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,
 2To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

 4I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—6just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—7so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Gospel: John 1:29-42**

29[John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!30This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ 31I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33I 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.’ 34And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”
 35The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” 37The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38When 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?” 39He 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. 40One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). 42He 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).

**Sermon**

For hundreds of years, the Jews had been anxiously looking for the long-awaited Messiah of God. They were given prophecies, but they also had their own ideas of what to expect, and those ideas were based on their hopes and dreams for a thriving and independent Israel where all would prosper.

Today, we are going to be focusing on the Gospel Reading from John. At this point in the public ministry of Jesus, Jesus had no disciples, but John the Baptist did. We often don't think about John the Baptist having disciples, but he did, and two of them appear in this passage; Andrew and another unnamed disciple. They recognized that John the Baptist was the promised forerunner for God's Messiah, and so they wisely decided to hang with him and see what happened. "Who knows?" they must have thought. "Maybe by hanging out with John, we will find what we are looking for, God's Messiah."

And that strategy worked! One day, the day after John baptized Jesus, John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 29 "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" and then he went on to recap the previous day when he had baptized Jesus, saying that he saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remaining on Jesus. I am sure that John was very animated and emotional about it because this was what he was looking for – the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets for all Israel, *and* the fulfillment of his life's work and ministry.

The day after that, John and his disciples saw Jesus again, and again John exclaimed, 36b“Look, here is the Lamb of God!” and this time, Andrew and the other unnamed disciple left John and followed Jesus. 38When Jesus turned and saw them following him, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” What a great question!

All Israel generally, and Andrew and the other unnamed disciple specifically, were looking for something. The question I have for you is Jesus's, "What are you looking for?" It’s a great question, isn't it? One that I believe each and every one of us should be asking ourselves regularly – because our priorities change often.

* What am I looking for?
* What am I looking for in life?
* What are my goals, aspirations, and desires?
* What am I looking for?

This reminds me of a story. And it may be a true story.

The three sons of an old woman returned home after years of looking for fame and fortune. They made merry and had dinner together. And before leaving, they handed their mother gifts.

The eldest son gave his mother the deed to a massive palatial chateau on the French Riviera.

The middle son gave her a sparkling Mercedes convertible.

Finally, the youngest son gave her a gilded cage with an exquisite, exotic, expensive blue-green parrot that can recite the entire Bible.

After a few weeks, the mother called each of her sons to thank them for their gifts. To the eldest son, she said, "Thank you for the lovely house, dear. It is truly spacious. However, it is so big that it becomes tiresome to move about in my old age, and at night, when the help is gone, it is a scary place to be alone. I think I should move back to the old house."

To the middle son, she said, "Thank you for the car dear. It is very luxurious. However, my cataracts are so bad I almost ran over a pedestrian the other day. I don't think I should be driving anymore."

Finally, to the youngest son, she said, "My dearest son, you know exactly what your mother likes! That chicken was absolutely delicious!"

"What am I looking for?" is a question that every one of us should be asking ourselves.

Andrew and the other disciple were looking for God's Messiah and hoped John the Baptist would be their gateway. They had been with John, the famous prophet who was filled with the Holy Spirit and who preached a message of repentance and preparation, but they knew he was really only the warm-up act. John said himself, "I am not the Messiah!"

John the Gospeler, the author of our Gospel Reading, didn't give us a lot of dialogue, but, after John the Baptist, the spiritual leader of Andrew and another unnamed disciple, pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, they left John to follow Jesus. They had found what they are looking for.

Jesus asked them, "What are you looking for?" There is that question again. It is a great question, isn't it?

I doubt it was entirely John the Baptist's proclamation that caused them to follow Jesus. When Andrew and the other unnamed disciple encountered Jesus, spent time with him, and studied him, they *recognized* that he was the fulfillment of the ancient prophets and the one their spiritual leader John the Baptist had been preaching about. They *recognized* that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and *they knew* that they had found what they were looking for, and made the decision right then, to follow him.

How did they recognize Jesus in that way – just know he was what they were looking for? I don't know, but I believe it. I believe that when I get to see Jesus face to face in eternity I won't need an introduction. I will simply *know* who he is. As an aside, I know that I will not be able to see Jesus face to face this side of eternity, but in some unexplainable way, I hope that I feel his presence when I walk the same dusty paths he walked when I go to Israel in February.

"What are you looking for?" It’s a great question, isn’t it? Oftentimes, our looking is not as pure as that of Andrew and the other unnamed disciple. We may look for wealth, fame, power, or pleasure. We may look for success in our careers, or we may look for the approval and acceptance of others. And these are not, in and of themselves, bad things to look for.

But what does Jesus say about these things? In his Sermon on the Mount, among other things, Jesus taught that we are not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. He said, 6:32-33 "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Jesus taught that if we seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, all of our earthly needs will be met. But, according to Jesus, we have to be willing to put God first. We have to be willing to put aside our own selfish desires and follow God revealed in Jesus Christ wholeheartedly.

But, as we have learned in life, this is a more difficult task than it sounds. Life is more complicated than that, especially in a world that is constantly telling us to prioritize ourselves around our own needs. I remember as a kid that not much was open on Sundays, and there certainly was no mail or parcel delivery. Now, almost every merchant is open on Sundays, and we can get almost anything our heart desires, delivered the next day or even the same day, from our phone – but I digress. If we want to truly experience the fullness of life that God has for us, we must be willing to put God and God's kingdom first.

If we would continue reading John 1 past the prescribed passage for today, we learn that the next day after Andrew and the unnamed disciple began following Jesus, Jesus found Philip and said to him, 43"Follow me." And Philip went and found Nathanael and told him, 45"We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

In just a few words, and I suspect, looking into the eyes of Jesus, Philip found what he was looking for and was willing to follow him and share this good news with others, like his friend Nathanael. But Nathanael was skeptical. He asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

Disbelief is not uncommon. It's easy to look at our circumstances and our own limitations and think that something good cannot come out of them. Jesus was the ultimate example of this. He was born to peasants in a stable, in the no-account town of Bethlehem. But through him, the salvation of the world was made possible.

I wish we were more like Philip, willing to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and share the good news of his love and salvation with others. But the truth is, we are often like Nathanael, letting our doubts and prejudices hold us back from following Jesus wholeheartedly.

But that is not the end of the story of Nathanael. I have Good News to share with you because "Hope Happens Here," and because it is Epiphany "Hope is Revealed."

At the conclusion of John chapter 1, Jesus reached out to Nathanael a little deeper, a little more intimately, and revealed a little more of himself and that is when Nathanael exclaimed, 49"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Nathanael was a hard sell. He wasn't going to be easily won over by the latest itinerant holy man. But when he encountered Jesus, he found what he was looking for.

Traditions vary but some say that after the Ascension, Nathanael traveled to India and Greater Armenia to fearlessly preach the Gospel of his Lord Jesus, and for that, he was likely martyred in a heinous way.

"I don't want that!" we would say. I am sure that was not what Nathanael was looking for either. What Nathanael was looking for was to faithfully expand the Kingdom of God by preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and given that we all will die, to receive the reward for his faithfulness won for him by the same Lord Jesus Christ – to which I say, quoting Jesus, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your LORD.'

The best outcome anyone could have. What are you looking for?

**Prayer**

God and Father of our Lord Jesus, without your Holy Spirit we lack the inspiration and strength to do any good. With your Son Jesus as our model of godly living, inspire us to look for opportunities to bring you glory and expand your kingdom. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen