

January 18, 2026
The Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, Rector

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

In last week's gospel, we heard Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan. Today, John the Evangelist picks up the story with an account overflowing with the language of vision; of looking and seeing.

In the first part of the passage, on the day after Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist says, "I saw the Spirit," after a dove had descended on the newly baptized Jesus. And again: "I myself have seen and have testified."

On the day after that, the third day, the Baptist tells his disciples, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" This is the only passage in the Bible that uses that title for Jesus, who "turns and sees" those disciples, and invites them to "come and see" where he is staying. Later, Andrew tells his brother Simon that he has "found" the Messiah. The passage ends with Jesus looking at Simon before renaming him Cephas, or Peter.

So, first, we have a lot of looking. Second, there are lots of questions. Early in life, most of us are taught to be courteous when we meet people, often by asking them questions. "How are you?" "Where did you go to high school?" "What do you do for a living?" "Do you think we'll get snow?"

This is small talk, that type of superficial social lubricant designed to put people at ease while not requiring too much actual engagement. You know how it feels when you ask someone, "how are you?" and they begin to tell you how they really are? Eek, right?

The questions in today's Gospel are a different kettle of fish. In other gospel accounts, Jesus' first words after his baptism are about teaching, or healing, or proclaiming the coming kingdom. Here, Jesus' first words (to disciples of John the Baptist) are a question. "What are you looking for?"

Boom! No small talk, but a question that jumps in with both feet. "What are you looking for?" The original Greek might also be translated, "What are you seeking?" or "What do you hope to find?" Which we might expand to, "What do you need?" "What do you long for?"

Let's linger here for a moment. What are you looking for? In the secret and quiet places of your heart, and as you welcome a new year, what are you looking for in your spiritual life? Hoping for, asking for. Do you know?

When you come to church, when you pray, when you read Holy Scripture, when you receive the Eucharist, what are you looking for? Are you looking for anything, or are these religious gestures that you inherited from your parents?

Are you seeking consolation? Affirmation? Belonging? Certainty? Do you want to know, or can you consent to trust? Are you looking to arrive, or looking to journey?

I know that was a barrage of questions, but trust me, I feel your pain. Many years ago, my first spiritual director asked me this very question, "what are you looking for?" It caught me off guard, and I gulped, and then croaked, "I want to be content." After a moment he replied, with a certain tone in his voice, "Well, since you're not a cow, contentment is not on the menu. We'll come back to that." Man, oh man! The very first question, and I got it wrong! Ouch.

So, it's probably no surprise that when the disciples of John the Baptist hear this question from Jesus, they simply dodge it. Maybe they didn't know what to say, either. And, instead of taking a wild shot at an answer, they answer Jesus with another question: "Where are you staying?"

I think this is akin to asking, "just where are you headed, Rabbi? What's your deal? Who do you hang out with? Will we like them? Will they like us? We want to know exactly what we're getting ourselves into with you."

How does Jesus respond? He doesn't offer an answer, he doesn't respond with another question. Instead, Jesus issues an invitation: "Come and see." John's disciples want answers, but Jesus offers relationship; he offers himself. "Come with me; see me." There is no brochure, no Facebook page, no TikTok clips. There is just Jesus.

Do you remember the verbs we talked about last week? The roadmap for a baptismal life? Continue, persevere, proclaim, seek, serve, strive. This week, we can add "come" and "see" to the list of verbs that lead us into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

If you want to know where Jesus stays and what Jesus is about, you have to follow him to see. A life spent following Jesus is not a life spent in one spot. A life spent following Jesus is a life on the move. There are days when we can't see very far down the road, when the path that leads to Jesus becomes clear only when we decide to walk it.

To that end, my colleague David Lose offers to us three more verbs: notice, share, and invite.¹

Notice. Imagine what it would be like to start every meeting, or every family dinner, with five minutes of folks taking turns naming where they have seen the presence of God in the world and in their lives. Or, if that is a hard place to start, what about naming those places we have seen where God needed to be – places of tragedy or distress or hurt.

Maybe over time we would get better at noticing where God actually is – in protesters or relief workers or first responders or caring neighbors or friends. Over time, as the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, we can develop the capacity to notice God in our lives and in the world. The book study that Deacon Harry and I will be leading in Lent will be focused precisely on this question. Stay tuned to the eTimes for more information.²

Share. Remember what the Psalmist said this morning? *Oh, that I could make them known and tell them!* (Ps 40:6) Many of us are nervous about sharing our stories of faith. Maybe you think that's the job for people dressed like me. Or for those other kinds of Christians. Perhaps you've had a bad experience on one side or the other of such a conversation. Or maybe you've just never tried it.

Practice is probably the only solution to this difficulty. So, today, I'm going to invite you to practice. When we exchange the Peace today, I invite you to try it out. Tell someone, at least one someone, why it is that you like this church community, one reason that you like to come here. Maybe it's the beauty of this place. Maybe it's the people, or a specific person. Maybe it's coffee hour.

It doesn't need to be a big deal, and yet it is a big deal simply because we're not used to doing it. But I invite you to practice. When we come to the Peace, I invite you to cross the aisle. Speak to someone in another quadrant. Tell them what brings you here. We have plenty of time. Come, and see where sharing takes you in relationship with each other.

Invite. This may seem the hardest of all. It can feel so intrusive, and of course, if you invite, you have to be ready if someone actually shows up. We invite people all the time: to join a book club or to play tennis, to come over for dinner, to attend a game or to go shopping. We're really good about inviting folks to come to many things ... just not so much to church.

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/notice-share-invite>

² We will be reading portions of *An Altar in the World* by Barbara Brown Taylor.

We invite people to things that mean a lot to us, to things that we want to share. Here's another invitation. Invite someone you know to join you, to share something that's important to you, to this place. That's it: Evangelism 101. It really is that simple.

Because what happens in places like this, among people like us, is more important now than ever. The world is starving for spiritual depth modeled by healthy congregations made up of "people learning how to pray together, serve together, get angry together, and love together—that's what's going to save the world."³

By God's grace, you and I are engaged in the task of forming, and then offering, a responsible public Christian witness to the world. Part of this is coming together as church called to be a truly different realm. With its prayers and creeds and arts and hallowed teachings, a church is supposed to be a countercultural kingdom of love, joy, justice, steadiness, and mercy that stirs people to go back out into the world and act "with strength and energy and wisdom from our tradition, and not just repeat whatever they've been hearing every week in the news."

Week after week, it all comes down to noticing and blessing what's good and miraculous, not simply cursing what's going to hell in a handbasket. "There's plenty of cursing out there, but finding people and actions to bless—now that's a hopeful thing."

So, those are my invitations. But here's the thing: It's not just me, or you, who is doing the inviting. It is God in Christ working through you to invite others into abundant life that is so much richer than anything we can buy. At the same time, and, just as importantly, it is God in Christ inviting you more deeply into that same life. Even if you struggle to name or understand or articulate your faith. Even when you struggle to share your faith with others. Even when you wonder if you have the right faith, or any faith at all.

Because, morning, noon, and night, Jesus is still there, still asking you what you are looking for, still asking what you most deeply need, still inviting you to come and see, and still determined to give you, and the world through you, more than you can possibly ask or imagine. Jesus simply will not give up on you, on us. Ever.

What are you looking for? Come and see! Amen.

³ This section is adapted from an interview with one of my classmates, Sam Candler, the Dean of The Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta <https://divinity.yale.edu/news/2026-01-15-yds-alum-sam-candler-better-to-bless-than-to-curse>.