

What are you Seeking?
Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 18, 2026

“What are you looking for?” It was the question Jesus asked in today’s gospel; it was the first of many questions to follow over the course of his ministry on earth. This question and its answer, were crucial, not just for those first disciples, but for you and me as well, as Jesus’ twenty-first century disciples.

“What are you looking for?” The question is translated slightly differently in some other Bible translations. The New English Translation, New International Version, Contemporary English Version, and New Living Translation translate Jesus’ question this way, “What do you want?” What are you looking for, or what do you want? Every disciple of Jesus Christ needs to ask themselves this question at various times in their lives.

Let me use my imagination a little as I set the stage for today’s gospel. We are told that the previous day John had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. And now, on this day we find John standing on the shore of the river along with two of his disciples. What were they thinking? What were they doing there? John may have been taking a break from all the baptizing, giving his cold body and pruned fingers a rest. There were probably a lot of other people around, some coming, some going; those who had just been baptized were heading home, those waiting to be baptized were just arriving, and many were milling about waiting to hear what John had to say.

Maybe one of John's two disciples mentioned being hungry, just before he dug into his pack for a snack. Maybe the two were asking their teacher John about some theological question they were wondering about. Maybe the three were just standing there enjoying the cool breeze and the feel of the sun on their faces. We have no idea what they were doing at that moment.

But the next thing we read is that Jesus walked by. Notice Jesus was not walking towards them or coming up to them; he was just, walking past. Maybe Jesus was a little further up the hillside walking away towards his next destination. But John suddenly spotted Jesus and said within hearing of his disciples: "Look, here is the Lamb of God." This phrase, Lamb of God, would have meant nothing to any other ethnic, cultural, or religious group or individual at the time, but to any Jew, and later for Christians, they would know the meaning of the phrase, "Lamb of God." It referred to the requirement in the Law of Moses that a lamb was to be sacrificed on the altar during religious ceremonies to atone for the sins of the people.

When the two disciples heard John gesture towards Jesus and say: "Look, here is the Lamb of God," they immediately left John and started walking towards Jesus, attempting to catch up with him. They closed the gap and eventually came alongside him. Jesus, now being aware of the two men, turned to look at them, trying to read the deep longings and desires of their hearts. He asked his important question: "What are you looking for?" or "What do you want?" In the New King James Version of the Bible, it is translated, "What do you seek?" Literally in the Greek the question is:

“What are you seeking?” Notice Jesus didn’t ask, WHO are you seeking? He asked, WHAT are you seeking? It is a deep, probing question.

Their response was a strange one. “Rabbi, where are you staying?” It doesn’t seem to line up with the deep question Jesus was asking. “Friends, what is it that you are seeking?” “Master, where are you going to spend the night.” Not surprisingly, there is more going on here. Lenski in his commentary on this passage speaks directly to the disciple’s response to Jesus: “In the question, ‘Where are you staying?’ lies the desire to have a private, undisturbed conversation with Jesus regarding the high thoughts and hopes which had begun to stir [in] their hearts.” The two disciples must have realized that Jesus’ question, “What are you seeking,” would not be an easy, quick one to answer. Their full honest response would require some undisturbed time and privacy to open their hearts to Jesus. And they sensed that Jesus was someone they could really open up to; someone they could completely trust.

What do we think those disciples may have been seeking? What were their deepest desires and longings? Undoubtedly, just like any Palestinian Jew at the time, they would have been concerned about the economic situation in Palestine, and the struggle many had to try and feed their families and pay their bills. They were also longing for freedom from foreign occupation; they were longing for the Messiah, their savior, to come. Yes, these longings, for political and economic salvation, would have been vitally important. And they may have thought that this was the totality of their deepest longings.

But then they met Jesus. As they stood there in his presence, hearing him ask his question, looking into his eyes, they were suddenly aware of a deeper longing and desire welling up within them. They realized that deep within their heart and soul a flame had just been lit; a thirst they had no knowledge of had just been revealed to them. With one seemingly simple question, Jesus had shone a light into the depths of their being, revealing a longing that was greater than any they had ever known. Yes, this was going to require a long conversation with Jesus.

Jesus' probing question "What are you seeking?" was not meant just for those two first disciples. It was meant for every disciple, every follower of Jesus down through the centuries, including you and me. We are all meant to answer this question.

While working on this sermon, I considered these first disciples, and their longings and desires that had been profoundly met by Jesus. I looked back over my life, and my many and varied desires and longings. As a human being, but especially as an identical twin, there was a desire within me to find a sense of oneness and intimacy with another human being, or, with a nuclear family. That is what I had always sought. I remember how traumatic it was for me as an eighteen-year-old, arriving at the Marine Core Recruit Depot in San Diego, California, knowing no one there, missing and longing for my family, and being yelled at on a regular basis. But eventually the Marine Corps became a new family, my new sense of oneness and purpose and meaning.

After further vocational training in Pensacola, I was stationed on Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Suddenly, those old feelings of loneliness crept back to the surface. Once more I was in a strange new place where I didn't know anyone. God used that renewed loneliness to reveal to me the deepest longing and desire of my heart and soul, one I had not previously known. You see, I never grew up in church, and never thought about God.

One January morning in 1977 Jesus Christ appeared to me, calling out to me, "Come, follow me." In that moment, my true, deepest longing and desire was revealed to me. The love of God washed over me, cleansing me of my loneliness, revealing to me the answer to Jesus' lifelong question for me: "Joe, what are you really seeking?" The answer for me had previously been, I am seeking a life partner, a family. I had never thought about God as a possible answer to my deepest longing and desire. A spouse; a family; these were the things I needed; this was my deepest longing and desire. But then, Christ revealed himself to me and called me to follow. And in that moment, I encountered the real answer to humanities, and to my deepest longing and desire, an encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ. In that moment, every other longing and desire that I had ever known, paled in comparison to this one.

Over my lifetime, as I grew in my knowledge of Christ, and experience of Christ as the fulfillment of my hearts deepest longing, I would still find myself at various times, and in various circumstances, still seeking to fulfill other longings; a longing for financial security, a longing for success, a longing for human intimacy. I wish I could say that my desire and longing for

more and more of God always outweighed my desire for other human longings, but that has not always been the case. There has occasionally been a tug-of-war over which longing or desire would take priority in my life.

Jesus' question to me and those first disciples, is the same question Christ is asking you, "What are you seeking?" What is your deepest longing, your deepest desire. In the short silence that follows this sermon, take time to reflect on this question.