

## 247 What Are You Looking For?

*(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "What Are You Looking For?", originally shared on January 11, 2022. It was the 247<sup>th</sup> video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bpHKaL2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)*

The Eurythmics were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame last November. One of their biggest hits, "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)", contains the lyrics,

"Sweet dreams are made of this  
Who am I to disagree  
I travel the world and the seven seas  
Everybody's looking for something."

What are you looking for? Jesus is asking that question in the Bible reading we're going to look at today. And it contains the key to revitalizing our churches.

You might recall the poster, one of the first of what we would call "memes" today, from way back in the olden days:

"The way to do is to be."—Lao-tzu, Chinese philosopher.

"The way to be is to do."—Dale Carnegie,

"Do be, do be, do." — Frank Sinatra.

Last week, we found out who Jesus is in his being.

Today, we're going to find who Jesus is in his doing.

Last week, we heard about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.

Today, we're going to cover some of the same ground, but we're going to see it from John's point of view

Oh, and it's going to show us how to do evangelism and revitalize our churches in **John 1:29-42**.

All of this is happening at the beginning of Jesus public ministry. What Jesus is all about is all laid out.

And yet, in the end, none of Jesus' followers get it. None of them. In fact, every one of them, including his closest disciples, people who have lived and breathed with Jesus for three years, deny that they even know who he is.

Here's how it starts, with the "he" being John the Baptist:

*<sup>29</sup>The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Here's Jesus, both who he is and what he's going to do to change everything we know about life, presented in one descriptive phrase.

Adam and Eve were created for a living relationship with God. Evil entered the world when they rejected the covenant God made with them. Their Sin separated humanity from God. How could that relationship be restored?

God called Abraham to sacrifice his one beloved son Isaac and, by faith, Abraham was ready to do it. But God stopped him and provided a lamb for the sacrifice in the place of Isaac.

God called each household among the people of Israel, in slavery in Egypt, to kill a lamb and paint the blood of the lamb over their door post. That night, the angel of death visited every household in Egypt and the first-born son died. Except where the angel of death saw the blood of the lamb over the door, it passed over that door and the people of God were set free from slavery.

God called the people of God to make an animal sacrifice on the annual Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, as a sacrifice for the sins of all of Israel, the people of God.

John announces right here, at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one, and that he will die in our place as a sacrifice so that all of God's people might be set free from the effects of Sin and have the living relationship with God for they were created restored!

He continues with **verse 30**,

*<sup>30</sup>This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup>I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup>And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."*

John declares right there his life's purpose in his offering of a baptism for repentance. Jesus comes to be baptized so that He might be revealed to the world.

The purpose of John's baptism for repentance becomes realized in the living reality of the one true living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

John continues in **verse 33**,

*<sup>33</sup>I 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.'*

*<sup>34</sup>And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."<sup>35</sup>The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,<sup>36</sup>and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"*

*<sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.<sup>38</sup>When 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?"<sup>39</sup>He 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.<sup>40</sup>One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.*

Two of John's disciples had understood what John was teaching and sought to follow a greater teacher, Jesus.

Jesus responds to them with a question, "What are you looking for?"

Everybody's looking for something. Few can name it, and fewer find it. And when they find it, they realize that they haven't found it, but have been found.

For example, Sally and I subscribed to Netflix during the pandemic. We still have it. But way more often than not, unless we're looking for something specific, we say "Let's see what's on Netflix," and spend an hour or so looking at trailers without success, give up, and go to bed. But, if someone we know recommends something to us, we watch it and are almost always glad we did.

What are you looking for?

John apparently was not looking for a larger following. He loses two of his disciples and is fine with that.

One of them, Andrew, tells his brother Simon about what he has found. John concludes this text, beginning with **verse 41**,

*<sup>41</sup>He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).<sup>42</sup>He 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).*

That is the key to evangelism and to church development right there, "We have found the Messiah" the deliverer, the one you have been looking for.

You might remember the pre-social media shampoo commercial where a woman says, "I told two friends" and the screen splits. And then three faces of the same woman say, "And I told two friends." And the screen splits again and nine faces of the same woman say, "And I told two friends," and so on.

That's how the Church grows.

Our media may change, but the personal witness of a credible friend or relative still accounts for 80% - 85% of all the people who come to Christ and who become active members of a local church.

The key to evangelism is not to find the right proposition or argument, but to invite people to come to know Jesus.

Evangelism is, as has been said, just one beggar telling another where to find food.

Evangelism is not inviting people to come to your church but is inviting people to come to know Jesus. And when people know Jesus, they want to come and worship Him.

Andrew invited his brother Simon to know Jesus and the result was so transformational that Simon's name had to change; his new name was Cephas (translated Peter), which means "the rock." It was given to him by Jesus.

What are people that you know looking for?

It's probably not a friendly church, which is not on a rapidly decreasing number of people's radar screens, but which is how most churches present themselves.

As we have done all too often throughout our history, we are answering the questions that people aren't asking.

What are people looking for? In what way do they express it? What should we be listening for?

Psychiatrist Victor Frankl survived a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. He wondered why some people survived while others did not. The thing he noticed that most survivors had in common was not health or youth or strength, but purpose. He observed that "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'." His "why" was to write his book, Man's Search for Meaning.

He said, "When a person can't find a deep sense of meaning, they distract themselves with pleasure."

Does this not describe our age. Civilizations in the West were once known for their great temples and cathedrals, then their centers for the fine arts, then their massive commercial centers. Now, the great cities are known for their sports complexes and entertainment centers.

What are people looking for?

In Blaise Pascal's 1670 defense of Christianity, Pensées he writes,

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

This is what some have described as the "God-shaped hole" in every person.

What are people looking for? "Everything that is not there," at least not there for long.

Some seek pleasure. Some seek any plausible answer that satisfies for now. Others in some counterfeit that looks like the real thing.

"Spiritual but not religious." Rehab as repentance. A life-coach for self-affirmation. Material success for a material world. Financial freedom for security. Artificial notoriety for real fame.

And yet, to whom can we turn when our world view is tested? When we encounter the question, "What are you looking for?" And the invitation, "Come and see."

Our present age gives us many opportunities to ask and to be asked.

What **are** you looking for?

When I was in seminary, I took a class on futures studies. We were taught that, in our lifetimes, one of our biggest challenges would be helping people find meaning when machines made work unnecessary. That now seems far away, but Artificial Intelligence is raising questions on what it means to be human, and it is enough?

We are learning more and more about DNA and genes, and the underlying proteins and the underlining metabolomes, and what theologian Leonard Sweet calls "God dust." But, what happens when we can eliminate any genetic trait that we find undesirable? What happens when something we value as a human trait is something that others do not?

Climate change and the current extinction of animal species has called the sustainability of the human race into question.

What are you looking for?

Is there meaning in life that can be found in who we are as human beings. And especially in whose we are?

Theology, the study of what we can know about God through reason and God's revelation, was once called The Queen of the Sciences. The word "science" is rooted in a Latin word for knowledge. How can we know what we know?

I saw a meme once that contained the text, "Biology is applied Chemistry; Chemistry is applied Physics; Physics is applied Mathematics." "And," someone commented. "Mathematics is applied Logic; Logic is applied Philosophy, and Philosophy is applied Theology." 😊

We can say "yes, there is meaning, and it comes through a transforming encounter with the one true living God in Jesus Christ.

What are you looking for?

Jesus both asks the question and answers it. He is all that ultimately satisfies, and the revitalization of our churches is contained in it.

Come and see.