

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

Imagine what it must have been like for the disciples of John the Baptizer. They were getting to spend time with the first true prophet to come along in over 400 years. John wore the clothes of Elijah, itchy camel's hair bound by a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). He ate the diet of Elijah, crunchy grasshoppers and wild honey. He came from the place of Elijah, the wilderness. He had the same spirit and the same power behind him, not just the force of his personality but the power of the Lord himself. John brought the message of Elijah: "It's time to repent and turn our hearts back to the Lord our God." To be with John was to be near the Lord. How fulfilling for spiritually minded people!

Unfortunately, students often practice selective hearing. They pick up on what they want to hear and set aside the rest. This happens in churches too. So John's disciples followed him around, listening to his message, preparing their hearts for the Messiah. They ate what John ate (presumably), fasted when John fasted (Matthew 9:14), and learned how to pray like John (Luke 11:1). And apparently, when John had his doubts about Jesus and sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he were the one who was to come or should they look for someone else (Luke 7 19-20), Jesus' answer did not satisfy John's disciples like it evidently did John. So John still had a following of disciples when Herod beheaded him. They were

the ones who made sure John's body received a proper burial, and then they told Jesus about John's death (Matthew 14:12). I'd like to believe that more of John's disciples became followers of Jesus at that time. But not all of them did. According to church history, there were still disciples of John in the year 200 A.D. who worshiped John as the Messiah who was to come.

John's disciples weren't the only ones who thought he might be the Messiah. The priests and the Levites and others in Jerusalem had wanted to know too. That's why they sent a delegation to ask John: "Are you the Christ, the Messiah?" Of course, John told them he was not. But some of his disciples were practicing that selective hearing and totally missed John's answer: "I'm here to prepare all you for the Messiah."

One day, at least a month after Jesus was baptized and had endured his 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, John was near the Jordan River, and Jesus came by. "*Look,*" John told those near him, "*that's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (see John 1:29). Did John want everyone to leave him and follow Jesus? I'm not sure, but if he did, two of his disciples did not pick up the cue.

We know this because ³⁵*The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.* ³⁶*When he saw Jesus passing*

by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” This time, ³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. If I were portraying this scene on video, I would have Jesus hesitate, but not look around, before moving on. I would have him appear not to notice the two following him, but since he’s true God, he would still know. I would have Jesus walk a little, the two disciples following for several minutes, inching closer and closer as Jesus makes his way along.

It probably happened pretty much that way, because when the two were right behind him, ³⁸Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” What an important question! What would you answer if Jesus asked you, “What do you want? What are you seeking?” During Jesus’ ministry many people would follow him around, hoping to see a miracle, or hoping to have a miracle performed on them to cure an illness, or to heal a loved one. Is that what you would ask for if Jesus invited you to tell him what you want? Is that all you want from Jesus? A healthy body? But won’t you just get sick with something else later and die anyway?

“What do you want? What are you seeking?” Many people want to get wealthy. Some play the lottery or go to the casino or try other schemes with the hope of striking it rich, the faster the better. Some of them even pray about it: “O Lord, let me win. I’ll give some of

it away to charity.” Is that all you want from Jesus? Enough money so you won’t have to worry about paying your bills? Or do you really mean ‘enough money’ so you won’t have to rely on God for daily bread and won’t need to be a careful manager of what God puts into your hands? Is that really what you want? Independence from the providence of your good and gracious God?

“What do you want? What are you seeking?” Well, Jesus, my Lord, my Savior, what I really want is forgiveness for all the times I’ve sinned against you or hurt people. I want to be part of your Kingdom, with you ruling over me. I want to be your faithful servant, doing everything that pleases you and avoiding everything that displeases you. And I want you to watch over me, either protecting me from danger or turning my troubles into triumphs. I want a strong faith that trusts you even when things look impossible.

By now I hope you realize that Jesus gives you an opportunity every day to answer his question: “What do you want? What are you seeking?” It’s called prayer. The only difference between you and John’s two disciples is that they could see Jesus standing in front of them.

Apparently the two disciples were a little taken aback by Jesus’ question:

“*What do you want?*” *They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher... [literally “rabbi” means ‘my great one,’ which is what the religious teachers were called by their students]), where are you staying?*” Does that seem like an odd question to ask? These two disciples are apparently asking Jesus for an invitation to hang out with him. It works. ³⁹“*Come,*” *he replied, “and you will see.”* How great is that! Lots of folks in our day think it’s awesome to get a back stage pass and hang out with celebrities. But to spend a quiet day with Jesus, talking, learning, listening—what could be better?

But isn’t this what we get to do when we come to church or read our Bible at home? We’re spending some quiet time with Jesus, learning, listening, talking to him in prayer. We can have right now what those two disciples had then, except for the seeing Jesus part. But someday.

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. John follows the Roman clock. So do we. The tenth hour was ten o’clock. This detail leads many to believe that the apostle John was one of the two disciples who spent the day with Jesus. ⁴⁰*Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was the other one of the two who heard what John [the Baptist] had said and who had followed Jesus.* (Did you notice that the writer of this

Gospel simply expects his readers to know who Simon Peter is? This indicates that the apostle John’s Gospel was written after Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s Gospels had been widely circulated.)

⁴¹*The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).* Wait. Isn’t that basically the same thing Jesus had said to Andrew and John? “**COME AND YOU WILL SEE.**” Come on, Peter, I want you to meet the Messiah!

How did Andrew become so convinced that Jesus is the Messiah? Was his faith based on only what John the Baptizer had said about Jesus: “*Look! The Lamb of God?*”? I wonder if interacting with Jesus that day confirmed John the Baptizer’s assertion. In any case, by the end of the day Andrew was convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. And now he just had to tell his brother Peter. Way to go, Andrew! You’ve got the right idea. This is exactly what Jesus wants his disciples to do. This is what young children do when they learn about Jesus. They don’t know that the world wants them to keep the ‘Jesus religion’ to themselves. So they tell their friends and their family. New Christians often do this too because they are so happy to know true peace with God through faith in Jesus.

Have you tried telling people about Jesus? If only people today were as ready to listen to us as Peter was to his brother Andrew. It seems that the love of most in our day has grown cold, just as Jesus predicted would happen in the end times (see Matthew 24). But our love has not grown cold, has it? We know that God loves everyone and wants them to have eternal life through faith in Jesus. So we love everyone. All sinners are welcome at St. John's. We want them to have eternal life. Let's do what Jesus did. Let's say, "COME AND YOU WILL SEE." Let's invite people to know Jesus through his Word. That's the easy part.

When you invite people to know Jesus better, some say yes, and it's wonderful. Others use creative ways to say 'No.' I heard this one time: "I'm ashamed to wear what I have. Will I be dressed appropriately?" I'm always happy to inform such people that you members of St. John's wear all kinds of clothes to church. Then I tell them: "It's not what you wear. It's that you're here. COME AND YOU WILL SEE. Put on something clean and come. Come as you are—just come."

Another response I've heard: "I don't have any money for an offering." This is one of my favorites. I love to say, "Let's see if this is really about money. Why don't you come to church every Sunday for three months in a row, and

don't bring an offering any bigger than two small copper coins. A poor lady once gave two small copper coins as her offering, and Jesus was ecstatic because she gave from a heart full of thanks. Come every Sunday for three months. Let's make it about Jesus, not money? COME AND YOU WILL SEE."

"Nah, I had religion crammed down my throat when I was a kid." What do you mean? Your parents made you come to church with them when you didn't want to? Why did you want to keep your distance from God already back then? Do you still want to stay away from him now? What have you been doing lately that you think he might say is wrong? Do you really love that wrong more than you love God? God loves you way more than the wrong loves you. COME AND YOU WILL SEE.

"Yeah, but those people at church are all good people, and I won't fit in." Actually, those people are just as sinful as you. But that's as it should be. The church is for sinners, just like the hospital is for sick people. People go to church because they want God's forgiveness for all the sins they have done and for all the good they have left undone. And they want God's help to fight against temptation. And they want to help encourage everyone at church to keep walking with God every day. That's why they go to church. COME AND YOU WILL SEE.