

**“What Are You Looking For?”  
(The Future of Inner Peace)**

**John 1:29-42**

Sermon by Jan Edmiston<sup>1</sup>

January 16, 2005

My friend Leigh is looking for a husband. In fact, it was her New Year’s resolution.

“What exactly are you looking for?” a group of women asked her over coffee. “Well, she said, “I’d like to meet someone with a little money and a good job.” (Leigh, I should mention, is in debt.)

“So you’re looking for financial security,” said one woman.

“Not exactly,” she said. “What I really want is a person who will help me branch out a little bit, someone who likes to travel, someone who reads books.”

“*We* read books,” one of the friends pointed out. “*We* like to travel. If you’re looking for a pal to do things with, you’ve already got *us*.”

“Not exactly,” said Leigh. “I guess I’m looking for someone who will worry about me, someone who will take care of me when I’m sick.”

“It sounds like you’re looking for a new mother,” said one not-so-helpful friend.

“No, that’s *not* what I’m looking for, she said, getting a little frustrated. “I’m looking for a person who is fun, but who sticks around when life is not fun. I’m looking for someone who will be with me on dark, stormy nights and on sunny summer days.

**What I’m looking for is a soul mate.”**

“Ah,” they all said. “A soul mate.”

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We have a neighbor who is looking for a new house. “What kind of place are you looking for?” we asked.

“We want a house with a bay window and a fireplace. We’d love to have a front porch big enough for Adirondack chairs and a swing so we could invite the neighbors over and talk. We’d like a quiet backyard with a bench and a weeping willow and a place for birdfeeders.”

“Wow,” we said. “It sounds like you want a retreat center.”

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this sermon were preached in 1999 at Fairlington Presbyterian Church, with updates for this particular Sunday. (It’s been a rough week.)

“That’s it! We are looking for a place where we can relax and live in peace. Something like a retreat center.”

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“May I help you?” a saleswoman said to the man shopping alone in a department store. “I’m looking for a blazer,” the man said.

“What kind of blazer?” she asked.

“Mostly I’m looking for something that fits. I’ve lost a little weight recently.”

“How about this one?” she said as she pulled out a gray windowpane plaid.

“No, my wife would have said that’s a little bit loud for me. She had great taste in clothes.” He continued to thumb through the selections and then muttered, “She died last summer.”

“I’m sorry,” said the saleswoman, noticing that while he was looking at the jackets, he wasn’t really looking at them.

“How about this one?” She pulled out a nice tweed with a trace of blue in the weaving.

“I don’t know,” said the gentleman, as she took it off the hanger and held it up for him to try on.

“Not bad,” she said. “It brings out the blue in your eyes.”

“You really think so?” he said.

“Definitely! You look wonderful. Very distinguished, but very stylish.”

“Could I wear this to a party?” he asked.

“What kind of party?”

“A woman in my building has invited me to a dinner party and I’m a little nervous.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll do just fine. And you’ll be the best looking man in the room.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I guess I was just looking for a little encouragement.”

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### **What are *you* looking for?**

Sometimes we say we are looking for *one* thing, when what we are actually looking for is something quite different.

At the time when Jesus started his ministry, before he chose his 12 disciples, his cousin John the Baptist had his *own* disciples. John kept telling them that *he* wasn't the Messiah, they were not quite sure about that. He was a great preacher and people followed him everywhere. Maybe he was the One.

But John always pointed to another. He spoke of the One whom the world did not know, even though that One – the real Messiah – was in the midst of them.

One day, John pointed Jesus out to Andrew and another of his disciples. And then we hear the very first words uttered by Jesus in the fourth gospel: **“What are you looking for?” Jesus said.**

Andrew and the unnamed disciple responded curiously by asking Jesus where he was staying. Not “Who are you?” or “What are you all about?” but “Where are you staying?”

The great thing is that Jesus took the question seriously even though it didn't make much sense. “Come and see,” he told them.

And by the end of the day, the two men had not only seen where Jesus lived; they had found their Savior.

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**All of us are looking for something that will save us**, whether we put it that way or not.

- If only we could find a soul mate . . .
- If only we could find balance in our lives, take a nice vacation, go on a restorative retreat . . .
- If only we could find the right job, the right schedule, the right diet. . .

Then everything would be alright. We would finally be at peace. We could finally find rest. *If only we could find the right church . . .*

People come to church for all kinds of reasons. On any given Sunday we might a young couple returning to church after many years away because they are getting married.

And they might sit on the same pew with a retired Marine and his wife who have just moved into the area. And behind them is a single 30-something woman with a broken heart and across the aisle from her is a man from the Monday night AA group.

And if asked why they've come to church, they might variously explain that they have ventured into church to find a place to get married or to meet new people or to make a fresh start. And while all those things might be *somewhat* true, they don't tell the whole story.

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Thomas Bandy, a United Methodist minister, wrote a book several years ago that suggests this: if people tell you they are coming to church to "make new friends" or "get involved" it's likely that what they *really* want, what they are *really* looking for is something deeper. They are looking for the opportunity to change something about their lives. They want something in life to be different.<sup>2</sup>

Rose Mary Dougherty who heads up the spiritual direction program at The Shalem Institute in Bethesda agrees. She says that the isolation and loneliness within our culture clouds what people are really looking for. We "are unable to discriminate between the companionship of interested people and the community of people who can help (us) seek God."<sup>3</sup> And so we go searching, often searching in all the wrong places for something that will fill our deepest needs.

What Andrew the fisherman and his unnamed friend were really looking for was not Jesus' address. They were looking for their Savior.

My hunch is that we have come here this morning *not* be to entertained by lovely music, not to be educated by a sermon. My hunch is that we want something even more than time with old friends or to make new friends.

My hunch is that we **want a community that will help us *find God*** because we know somewhere in our deepest selves that *what we really want*, what we really *need* is for something to be different. **We** want to be different.

Our culture here in the United States is supposedly very spiritual, but most of our culture is not in church this morning. We are a spiritual nation, but not necessarily interested in organized religion.

People who don't "do" church must laugh at us. Here we are, when we could be sleeping in or getting errands done or reading the paper over a third cup of coffee. We could be catching up on yesterday's sports highlights or getting ready for another busy week.

<sup>2</sup> *Kicking Habits – Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches* by Thomas Bandy. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> *Group Spiritual Direction* by Rose Mary Dougherty. New York: Paulist Press. 1995.

But no – we are *here* hoping against hope that something will happen in this quiet time. We are looking for something that will change things, something that will give us hope that things can be different. Maybe – just maybe – we’ll find what we’re looking for: a spiritual shot in the arm, a sense of peace, a connection with God, an answer to some great Divine Question.

No matter what we say we are looking for, Jesus has the same response he gave to the two disciples: “Come and see.”

*Come and see where I live. Come and introduce your friends to me. Come and follow me.*

And by the end of the day – if we are pointed on the right path, if we are headed in the right direction, if we follow this amazing Jesus – we will find what we have really been looking for all along. And it changes us.

The Psalmist says that: *God’s Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*<sup>4</sup> If we are looking for something eternal, this is the place to begin – with God’s Word and most especially with God’s Word made human in Jesus Christ.

“What are you looking for?” Jesus asks. *Come and see.*

Let us pray:

God of transforming power: call us, move us, help us follow your path, in the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Psalm 119:105.