

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

What are you looking for? Come and see.

The call of the disciples in the other three Gospels is about Jesus finding and inviting disciples to follow him. It feels just a little bit different in John's account as John the Baptizer gets involved. John, the Gospel writer, never referred to the other John as "the baptist." The writer made it very clear from his first introduction what the voice in the wilderness was there to do... "He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." John's purpose in John's Gospel was to witness to Christ, to help others see.

So when Jesus walks by, John tells his disciples to pay attention, to see what was there in their midst. "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" And two of his disciples immediately respond. They want to see, they want to learn more about this man about which John has made such amazing claims.

When Jesus sees them following, he asks them, "What are you looking for?" I imagine this scene with a huge pregnant pause at this point as the two would-be disciples look at their feet, look at each other and try to figure out what to say next.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lamb, how are you going to take away the sins of the world? That doesn't sound right. Do we ask him to baptize us? Do we ask him what the Holy Spirit felt like when it came down on him?" Finally, they settle on, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

That might not be exactly what they were really looking for, but it's the question they have, and the answer Jesus gives is heaped with layers of meaning, "Come and see." Maybe, it's just an invitation to whatever house he was staying in, but it hints at so much more.

These first disciples soon repeat that phrase as they start to tell others about this person they're going to follow. None of them know exactly what it is they will see, but they respond to the invitation and follow. They go to where Jesus was staying, but the invitation to come and see led to so much more.

We moved to West Virginia when our kids were 1.5 and 3.5. It was our third house in about three years, and we were looking for a place to settle, to remain, to stay. That meant finding a church community where we could continue to worship as a family. Emphasis on "family."

We went to the closest Lutheran church to our house – only 12 minutes away and

pretty easy to get to. As we walked in the door with our two very little kids, probably with Syd in Laurel's arms and Cole holding my hand, the greeters were very welcoming and very...insistent...that we knew that the nursery was right there by the door. We didn't even get to see the sanctuary before these well-meaning folks assumed they knew what we were looking for. Two or three times as we met people on our way into the narthex, we were reminded of where the nursery was. And we took our kids into the sanctuary where they sat in the pew with us. They were the only children there.

Laurel and I didn't have to openly acknowledge what we were both feeling as other folks in worship repeatedly looked at our kids with apprehension, whether they were making any noise or not. Worship didn't feel particularly good, because we clearly weren't supposed to be together as a family in that sanctuary.

We didn't go back. We ended up at a church, much farther from our house, but where everyone expected our kids to be in worship with us. A church where our very young kids learned to sing the Lord's prayer – LBW setting 3, where they joined the children's choirs, and where they were encouraged to worship with everyone else.

That's part of our family's journey through churches before I became a pastor, and there are a few other stories I could tell about what we were looking for when we were coming to church, but I wanted you to hear how easy it can be to **assume** we know what someone is looking for and miss the opportunity to show them the Lamb of God, miss the opportunity for them to encounter Jesus. That first church in WV never asked what we were looking for or invited us, all of us, to come and see.

I'm also not suggesting in any way that St. Paul's resembles that church. In fact, I would say the opposite is true. I've been a visitor to a lot of congregations. We've been stared at for sitting in someone's pew. I've been confused by too many books or not enough directions. I've watched well-meaning members swarm and overwhelm visitors with information or encouragement to the point of seeming so incredibly desperate.

And all it really takes, basically, is to listen and invite. "What are you looking for? Come and see." As a congregation, we do this very well. I've witnessed you all welcoming new people with genuine interest and grace. We might not have everything someone is looking for when it comes to a faith community, but we authentically and faithfully show them who we are...and by so doing show them who God is.

Churches of every type are trying to figure out what it means to be welcoming in today's world. It's not the same as what it was when you could assume that everybody you met – especially if they were new to a community – was looking for a congregation like the

one they were raised in. Today's reality is that many of the folks we meet weren't raised in church at all. A lot of them might not be sure what they're looking for.

There are all kinds of gimmicks and programs that churches use to try to get people to think and be like them. I'm not sure it has to be that complicated and it certainly doesn't have to be as manipulative as some of those methods can be. It shouldn't be a process filled with assumptions. Ask them what they're looking for and invite them to come and see.

A lot of congregations miss that because they really are simply desperate. Desperation doesn't lead to being a good witness, but I think that is something this congregation has figured out. For someone who is looking, we simply need to give them a chance to see. Not to see how good we are or how much we do, but to see the Lamb of God, to see the God who loves them...the God who loves you. The God who remains with us. Come and see. Amen.