

January 18, 2025—The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
The Rev. James Wyatt

Come and See

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” Which I guess is a pretty natural question to ask if you notice someone following you. It’s not too different, really, from “Can I help you?” “Do you need something?” It’s certainly more polite than “Why are you following me?”

But then Andrew and the other disciple with him give an answer that’s not quite as natural: “Teacher, where are you staying?”

There’s a web site I use when I want to look up the Greek text of a passage in the Bible, but it also has all these old, old Bible commentaries—I think the most recent one dates from around 1905. I usually don’t pay much attention to these, but I found myself really curious about what interpreters might have to say about this passage, and I was simultaneously sort of baffled and amused by the responses I found there. This example is pretty typical: Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, written in the 1740s, explains “that that was not a proper place, in the public way, to enter into a conversation with him, and acquaint him with what they were desirous of; but [they] should be glad to know where he lodged, that they might wait upon him there, either then, or on the morrow, or at any convenient time.”

Now, I don’t mean to suggest that I know better than these scholarly fellows whose works are still being read centuries after they were written. But at least in this case, I come away from these commentaries thinking, wow, did they ever miss the point!

Fundamentally, if you approach this passage as if it were a transcription of a conversation that actually happened somewhere near the Jordan River, then I can understand the temptation to try to get inside the disciples’ heads and explain why their question was a natural and appropriate response to the question Jesus asked them. But again, I think that’s missing the point. Because the Gospel of John is not trying to record the exact words of a conversation, it’s making a theological statement about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

“What are you looking for?” Jesus asked. If you were here last week, you might remember that I asked a very similar question to Tim and Erin and BreAnna as we celebrated the start of their journey toward baptism and confirmation: I asked each of them, “What do you seek?” And they had an answer prescribed for them by the Book of Occasional Services: “Life in Christ,” in Tim’s case, as a candidate for baptism, or “Deeper life in Christ,” for those on the road to confirmation. So “What are you looking for?” on one level seems like a natural question to ask someone who’s following you, but it’s also a theological question: “What do you seek?” What are the longings of your heart and your soul? What restless search do you need satisfied? What aching hope do you need fulfilled? What enlightenment do you hope to achieve? “What are you looking for?”

And the disciples’ question isn’t about a hotel recommendation, or a polite way of saying, “I say, good fellow, we don’t mean to intrude on you here, but perhaps we could call upon you at your residence so we might have time to ask you all our questions at your convenience?” See, the word that’s translated here as “staying”—the Greek verb μένω—is another one of those words that means something special in the Gospel of John. It appears 118 times in the New Testament, so it’s not an uncommon word, but more than half of those times are either in the Gospel of John or in the first letter of John. It’s sometimes translated as “remain”—as in “I saw the Spirit descending... and it **remained** on him” (John 1:32)—but especially in John and 1 John, it’s often translated as “abide,” which is a pretty archaic word we don’t use too much any more. But it basically means the same range of things that μένω does—to stay, to remain or persist, to live or dwell. So here are some of the other examples of the use of this word in John.

In John chapter 6, Jesus says, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood **abide** in me, and I in them.” (John 6:56)

In chapter 14, Jesus says, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, **to be with** you”—to **abide** with you—”forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he **abides** with you, and he will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

And chapter 15: “**Abide** in me as I **abide** in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it **abides** in the vine, neither can you unless you **abide** in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who **abide** in me and I in them bear much fruit.” (John 15:4-5)

And the first letter of John says, “God is love, and those who **abide** in love **abide** in God, and God **abides** in them.” (1 John 4:16)

So right here at the beginning of the Gospel, John sets up a major theme of his theology with an apparently simple question: “Teacher, where are you staying?” Where do you **abide**? It doesn’t have anything to do with finding out what local inn Jesus is giving his patronage to. I think it’s about discovering the answer that Jesus gives throughout the rest of the Gospel: “I am staying in you, and you are staying in me.”

So when Jesus answers their question, when he says, “Come and see,” I have to imagine a twinkle in his eye. Because he’s not just inviting them to come and see the great hotel where he’s crashing for a few days, he’s inviting them on a journey of discovery—much like the one that Tim, Erin, and BreAnna set out on last week. The goal of that journey is our goal too: Life in Christ—life abiding in Christ as he abides in us. He’s inviting them, and us, into a life of discipleship, a life spent following him and trying (with God’s help) to live like him.

There’s a theory that whenever the Gospel of John leaves a character unnamed, especially one of Jesus’ disciples, the author’s intent is to invite you the reader into the story in that place. So when we read that two of John the Baptist’s disciples followed Jesus and stayed with him, and we learn that one of those two was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, it appears that the Gospel writer has left space for us. Who was the other disciple who went on this journey with Andrew? Maybe it was John, the author himself. Maybe it was some unremarkable disciple whose name is now forgotten. Or maybe it was you.

So when Jesus turns and asks you, “What are you looking for?” what answer would you give?

Are you tired, looking for a place to stay and find rest?

Are you sick, looking for a place to stay and find healing?

Are you aching with grief for this broken world, for ailing loved ones and people caught up in violence and unrest, looking for a place to stay and find comfort?

Are you lost, struggling to find meaning and purpose, looking for a place to stay while you find your way?

Are you teetering on the brink of despair, wondering what kind of world your children will inherit, looking for a place to stay and find some glimmer of hope?

“Teacher, where are you staying?” Where do you abide, where can we find you in all this sorrow and suffering and despair?

And he says to you, with a twinkle in his eye, “Come and see, friends. I abide in you.”

Jesus abides in us when we eat his body and drink his blood, when we share in the feast he has prepared for us. Just as his presence transforms perfectly ordinary bread and wine into the food and drink of eternal life, so his presence transforms the perfectly ordinary world around us into a window to the Holy, giving us glimpses of the Divine.

Jesus abides in us when we are branches connected to his vine, drawing our spiritual sustenance from the Source of life through our participation in the life of the Church—a community that supports and nurtures our connection to God. “By [God] you were called into the fellowship of [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,” as Paul says. (1 Cor 1:9) And his presence in us brings forth the fruit of the Spirit in us—fruit of love and joy and peace, so that we “are not lacking in any spiritual gift.” (1 Cor. 1:7)

Jesus abides in us when we abide in him—when we walk in his way of love, loving not just *our* people, our family and neighbors and people like us, but loving *all* people, people on

the margins, people who don't look like us, people we disagree with, even our enemies and our persecutors.

Jesus abides in us, making us “a light to the nations, that [God's] salvation may reach to the end of the earth,” (Isaiah 49:6) as Isaiah put it—making us a ray of hope for a dark and frightening world.

Thanks be to God.