

**2 Epiphany  
January 19, 2020**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus  
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.  
Amen.**

**Sermon by The Rev. Deena M. Galantowicz**

There is a thread connecting our readings this morning. All through today's scripture readings, people are being called to further, deeper spiritual maturity. In the First Reading, Isaiah discerns an even greater vocation for his people than that of their own recovery. And then in the psalm, the writer expresses how his vision of God and of what God requires, becomes more mature, deeper. In the Second reading, Paul is making every effort to help the people of the Corinthian Community realize their spiritual potential.

And then, this week's Gospel reading is clearly a continuation of the events occurring at the Baptism of Jesus, which was last week's Gospel and sermon focus. I'd like to take a deeper look at this Gospel passage today because, somehow, every time I read it, one particular sentence keeps jumping out at me. It seems to have all capital letters and commands my attention. I find it impossible to overlook. And that sentence is when Jesus asks the followers of John, some of whom have now turned to follow Jesus...Jesus asks them ..."What are you looking for?" This is the first question Jesus asks his would-be followers, and I believe it is a question for all of us. It sounds simple, but it is one of life's great questions: "*What* are you looking for?" In your heart, in your quiet self, what are the hungers that drive you forward in your journey toward a deeper spiritual life? Is it to know Jesus more clearly; follow him more nearly and love him more dearly? What are you looking for as you continue to wonder about your faith? As we say goodbye to an old year and welcome a new one, what are we hoping for, asking for, looking for and where does our spiritual life fit? Where does the tugging within want to lead us? Do we even know? Have we been quiet enough/introspective enough, to ask: "Is it well with my soul?" And there is the Jesus question -- "What are you looking for?"

I've been mulling over this question all week. When we come to church, when we read and hear Holy Scripture, when we sing hymns, some so familiar that they immediately cast us back to a much earlier time in our lives .... what are we looking for? //// Is it right there and we don't see it? //// Is it right within and we've rushed right past it? Actually...are we looking for anything, or are we just going through the motions of "this is what we do"... or this is what my parents always did, or at least one of them, or maybe a grandparent? What were they looking for and how did they go about it? Think of it seriously. Here we are. What are we looking for? Consolation? Belonging? Certainty? Just a good feeling? A reprise from loneliness? Are we looking to arrive? Or...perhaps... to journey?

I suppose it's no surprise that those soon-to-be-disciples, who first hear the question, simply dodge it. Perhaps, like us, they didn't know what to say. Or they hadn't thought about it. When Jesus asks, "What are you looking for?" they are completely thrown, perhaps as we are if we think of him asking that of us. What would any of us say to this question? Especially if we really have no idea what we *are* looking for? Well, for them, instead of attempting a response, they blurt out a silly reply. They

ask Jesus their own question: "Teacher, Where are you staying?" There is no effort to take advantage of their confusion, Jesus merely says, "Come and see." So they did. And that made all the difference! Look at this simple sentence, "They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him all day." It was a day they would never forget; it would change their lives forever. Notice the sequence: They came, they saw where he stayed, and they remained. ....When you think of it...This sequence forms as good an objective for the life of a congregation as any. A congregation needs to be the kind of community where, if we come, we see Jesus, AND we stay...we remain.

And, if we do indeed stay because we feel closer to the Lord...what might we do because of it? Well, according to today's Gospel, it meant so much to at least one of those who had that experience with the Lord on that remembered day, that he went and told somebody about it. "We have found the Messiah," he said excitedly. I doubt that WE would use language like that, but surely some of us ARE sharing about the difference it makes in our lives to have discovered the community of faith called St. Cyprian's. And so often what is expressed to others is a mix of thankfulness and amazement that such a place of worship exists and is welcoming to any and all. My prayer is that, as we continue to grow, those who have been here a little longer will continue to reach out to anyone they have not had some time with because they are newer, so that we will always be genuinely *welcoming* to others who are probably journeying as we are.

Well now, back to our Gospel, the Gospel of John. As do all the Gospels, John singles out Simon. In this Gospel, Simon's brother Andrew, brings Simon to Jesus. We do not often meet someone who immediately changes our name, but that's what Jesus did with Simon. Jesus calls Simon "*Cephas*" which is Aramaic for the "ROCK." The Aramaic comes out in Greek as Petros and in English as Peter. In whatever language though, the nickname of Cephas from Simon sounds strange. What does Jesus see in Simon that merits this nickname, the Rock? WE know that Simon does not always act like the Rock. For instance, the Rock quivered in his sandals standing by the fire as Jesus was led away by the soldiers. The Rock denied being a disciple of Jesus when the going got tough. But, somehow, Jesus looked at Simon and saw the Rock. "What are you looking for?" Jesus asked. Whatever Simon was looking for when his brother told him they had found the Messiah, what Simon found was *himself*; He found himself as Jesus saw him. What a blessing!

The writer of the Gospel of John wanted us to know who John the Baptizer was, who Jesus was, and who the disciples, especially Simon, were. We might have come here looking to know better who we are. Simon found himself by trying to find the Messiah. What Jesus said to Simon is good for us to hear./// We often hear in church not to be too full of pride, not to think too much of ourselves. We also need to hear that from time to time. But, Jesus saw more in Simon than Simon knew was in him. We need to hear that for ourselves. Maybe our Good Lord sees more in us ...our abilities, our gifts, our potential, our strengths, that no one else, including ourselves, can see. Maybe the Lord God sees OUR inner ROCK.

There are people who just seem to always have known what their life's work is going to be. They seem to have come into the world already programmed to be what they will be, and they never deviate from their path. And sometimes those who have to thrash around for some years of indecision envy them. I mention this because when I think back to our First Lesson, how Isaiah is able to name what he perceives to be the gifts he has been given, I hear him say, "He made my mouth like

a sharp sword...he made me a polished arrow.” Isaiah realizes that God has given him a gift of articulation, a flair for language that pierces the mind and heart of all who hear him, from then until now.

We also need to assess the gifts we have been given. To look at ourselves and to try to sincerely discern our gifts is not necessarily narcissistic. Actually, it is good stewardship of whatever God has given us. It can help us enormously to make wise choices and good decisions as we move through life. Perhaps that is indeed a part of the answer to the question, “What are you looking for?” Perhaps a deeper quietness and introspective look at who we are really, and what might be our gifts, though dormant, and who or what leads our life and all its choices, could help us to answer the question, “What are you looking for?” Certainly it would help us enormously to make wise choices about where we put our effort and our energy. And, I would suggest that such quiet, introspective effort to really know who you are, and what could be your nickname, given lovingly by our Lord, would be a large part of the answer to “What are you looking for.”

There is a wonderful bumper sticker sort of saying that I think is apropos of what we are considering this morning. Since we are still in the Season of Epiphany and since Epiphany means “a sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something”, or “a comprehension of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization”, I think it is quite apt. It says, “Wise men still seek him!” May we be among those wise ones who know that -- THAT is what we have been looking for all along: The reality of Jesus as the Lord of our lives. And may our decisions, our use of our time, our choices in relationships and our sharing of our gifts and our treasures, reflect at least our partial answer, to “What are you looking for?”

Amen