

JANUARY 18, 2026

Sermon Text John 1:29-42 (NRSVue)

29 The next day (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! **30** This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ **31** I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, so that he might be revealed to Israel.” **32** And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. **33** I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ **34** And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, **36** and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” **37** The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. **38** When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” **39** He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. **40** One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. **41** He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). **42** He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Sermon Title: What Are You Looking For?

The season of Epiphany, the first Ordinary Time of the church year, is a season of ongoing revelation of just who the Christ Child is. But in the words of Diana Butler Bass – Epiphany is anything but ordinary! The word itself, “epiphany” is glorious – it can mean appearance; manifestation; insight; revelation; an illuminating discovery. So it makes sense that the season of Epiphany continues to shed light on who Jesus was and is and will be. Last week, we saw in the Matthew story of Jesus’ baptism. Today we look from a different angle at the event of Jesus’ baptism, and how we are called to discipleship by the presence of God-in-our-midst.

The Revised Common Lectionary, which is the set of Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle and Gospel text readings that take us through the church year and much of the Bible in a three year cycle, brings in the Gospel of John this week. Each of the lectionary years A, B and C focuses on one of the synoptic gospels. Those are the three gospel books of Matthew, Mark and Luke that closely mirror one another; they have similarities in wording, in the general chronology of the events of Jesus' life, and their references to the Old Testament. They have enough similarities that it suggests they were written in reference to each other and to a common outside source that scholars refer to as Q. They have some content that is unique to each one – but they're often more similar than different.

But the Book of John – it sounds and feels different from the other three gospels, and the Lectionary intersperses John throughout all the years of the cycle. We'll move around between Matthew and John in this year, listening to them talk back and forth, seeing together how they teach us more about what God was “revealing” in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah.

There are unique features in the Gospel of John not found in the other gospels. We have to read it with a slight note of caution: John was written during the final schism between the Jewish Christians following “the Way” found in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the people that stayed in Judaism exclusively. So we hear the phrase “the Jews” much more frequently, which has led in history to a blaming of the Jewish people as a whole – contributing to the anti-Semitism that continually rears its ugly head. But we don't throw out the book based on that bias – being aware of its limits, we rejoice in the unique way it reveals the Son of God. Some differences in this gospel are: it has a different feel in its wording and use of the Greek language; it includes long discourses – like little sermons – by Jesus all through the book, the largest in Chapters 14-17. It uses a lot of “I AM” statements – “I am the Bread of Life”, “I am the Living Water”, instead of the parables we find in Matthew, Mark and Luke. John includes a lot of miracles that reveal the divine aspect of Jesus. And it records events not found in the other three: the wedding at Cana; Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and the woman accused of adultery that was about to be stoned; Jesus' nighttime discussion with Nicodemus and the “you must be born again” analogy; the stories of Mary and Martha and the raising of Lazarus from the dead; the foot-washing scene at the Last Supper; the encounter with Thomas and the disciples after his resurrection; and the final breakfast with Peter by the lakeshore before his ascension.

John doesn't start with Jesus' ministry like Mark, or further back with Jesus' birth and infancy like Matthew and Luke. John begins all the way back to creation, echoing the first words of Genesis – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. He was in the beginning *with* God." Compared to the other three gospels' more historical narrative of Jesus' earthly ministry, this gospel leans into Jesus' *divinity*, presenting a reflective, theological portrait of Jesus as the Eternal Word. And we look at the Book of John during Epiphany, the season of revelation and illumination, because of the special role "light", or "seeing" plays in this book. In Chapter 1 alone there are two dozen references to light, awakening, seeing, looking and revelation. And it's why the followers of Jesus in the Gospel of John aren't called to "go and do" like in the synoptic gospels; in John's Gospel, they are called to "come and *see*."

After the prologue connecting Jesus to God and creation, John the Baptist is introduced in verse 6. We don't hear the story of his origins, the miracle that surrounds his own birth to Zechariah and Elizabeth. We're just told "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a *witness to the light*, so that all might believe through him..." Preceding our sermon text I read, verse 19 states, "This is the testimony given by John." So we begin to see Jesus revealed from the viewpoint of John the Baptizer himself.

First, as John sees his relative Jesus coming toward them, he points to him, saying, "Here is the Lamb of God!" Then John relays what he saw at Jesus' baptism, his own witness to the "Spirit descending from heaven 'like a dove'." This led to John's explanation that his own baptizing was done with water, but for Jesus, "he baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And then he gives the first testimony in this gospel to Jesus' divine nature: "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." I myself have *seen*.

We get one more identification of the divine nature of Jesus from the viewpoint of John. Standing with two of his disciples, and seeing Jesus again walk by John again points him out saying "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" Shifting their focus as a result, these two disciples move on to join the disciples of Jesus for a day. One of these new disciples of Jesus is identified as Andrew, brother of Simon Peter. The second isn't identified, but given the first-hand reporting of this gospel and the detailed account of Jesus' sermons throughout this book, it has often been surmised that this second disciple was John, brother of James and son of Zebedee, the John who is usually credited as the author of this book.

The movement from John's testimony about the true being of Jesus, his observations of what happened at Jesus' baptism, and the calling of the first disciples, is different from the calling of the 12 disciples found in the other gospels. John directs his disciples' attention to Jesus; they followed where he pointed and made the decision to follow Jesus. In the Gospel of John, the first disciples aren't called by Jesus at the seashore while fishing, with the words "Follow me." The Gospel of John states: "When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, *"What are you looking for?"* And later, as Andrew shares this event with his brother Simon, he says "We have *found* the Messiah (or, the Anointed.)" In John, Peter joined the group, then Philip and Nathaniel. We do not hear the additional names of any of the other twelve until toward the end, with Judas' name coming up at the Last Supper and confrontation at the Mount of Olives, Thomas' doubts in Jesus' post-resurrection appearance in the upper room, and the phrase "the other disciple ... the disciple whom Jesus loved," who stayed at the foot of the cross. And so the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John, while they are directed at his immediate circle of disciples, take on a broader feel. John's words speak as much to future disciples: the early churches started by the followers of Jesus Christ after his ascension to heaven, and to those of us sitting in this space together as the church today.

The apostle Paul was speaking to one of those early churches in Corinth in his first letter to the Corinthians. This letter is in response to reports coming back to him that the church in Corinth was struggling to live in loving community. Discord and division was taking them over. And so Paul is intervening, trying to point out the danger of conflict between fellow believers, and the distraction that this was creating from where their attention and efforts should be pointed towards – following the Son of God, embracing life together as modeled through the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ. But Paul first starts out with love and encouragement. He reminds them that their participation in the little church in Corinth is a vocation – a calling. He reminds them to reorient themselves to what Jesus brought – a living, breathing glimpse of God. Paul is asking them to focus on Jesus himself, which all of scripture points to, to show them the path out of the conflict. And he states "9 God is faithful, *by whom you were called into the partnership* of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." You were called. This is a vocation to be part of the body of Christ, to live in spiritual community with each other. But something brings people to that point of answering that call. So reflectively, he is subtly hinting at Jesus' own question: *"What are you looking for?"*

Two Saturdays ago the leadership of this church – the ruling elders and deacons, committee chairs and coordinator of children’s education – met together for a few hours in part to ensure an understanding of each others’ respective roles and responsibilities under our Book of Order. But, the majority of the time we reflected upon what this church is, and how it can continue to be, vital and healthy. We looked at different marks or signs of a church that is seeing Christ in this world, pointing a church to Jesus’ message of love and salvation in all it does. The words of Paul in chapter 1 of the letter succinctly articulate what we were reminding ourselves of: “**5** for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind **7** so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To begin that thought process of what gifts we have and how we can reveal Jesus, we started out the morning sharing what called us individually to this church, and what made us stay. In the answers shared, we were responding in the past tense to Jesus’ question: What were you looking for? Because it’s a question not just for the two disciples following what John the Baptist was directing them to look at, pointing to the next direction they should walk toward. It’s a question that made them move past “John told me to” – because not all his disciples did follow – to the deeper question “Why DID you follow who he pointed to?”

We continue to need to let Jesus’ question wash over us: What are you looking for? What are you looking for by sitting here in this space this Sunday, or watching this on livestream or the uploaded recording later in the day and week? What brought you here, for many of you repeatedly returning for 3, 10, 30, 60 years? For some, you found a place that has made you feel deeply connected over the years, where you have developed deep friendships and you feel seen when you step through the doors. For many of you, meeting family needs were what you were looking for – a safe place to have your children learn the love of God and how to love their neighbor as themselves, and a safe place to get support in being a parent. For some, you’ve found these worship services serve as a reorienting time in your week, a pause that helps you to reflect on life and to lift yourself out of the routines and demands of earthly living. For others, you are looking to fill a curiosity in the divine, and a desire to learn more about the Scriptures, meeting a need to go deeper into these words’ meaning and guidance. For some, you’ve found a place where you can feel the range of emotions of being a human, from the joy in shared living in watching our children learn the Word of God, to the sadness and sorrows when life is hard and painful and filled with grief, knowing we can show that sorrow in trust with each other. And for some, you

were looking and have found a place to serve and uplift the marginalized in our community. We all were looking for something when we walked through the doors of this building; and we in some way in this space together the path would keep us in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, a space that gives us a glimpse of something beyond this plane of living. A possibility of newness, the promise of a world lived as God created it, good and worthy of the love showered on it regardless of our flaws and failings – this is also something we were all looking for even if we don't quite word it that way. So, we continue to look for the words, the signs, that God gives along the path of life, the signs of God's loving presence. We are looking ... together.

Conclusion

John 1:14 states, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have *seen* his glory." In this glorious season of Epiphany, we look for the ways God is revealed in and through Jesus Christ. We find it revealed in the words of John the Baptist today, and we find it going forward on the path to the cross in the words and acts of Jesus. Pausing occasionally to ask how you came to be walking along this path, reflecting on what you were, and are, looking for, helps you to continue to see how Jesus through the Holy Spirit is guiding you on the path you were called to walk along, with fellow travelers walking alongside you. Jesus' own words recorded in John affirm this questioning and looking: "Ask, and it will be given to you. *Seek* and you will find." So in reasking that question, acknowledging part of the Christian walk is seeking a word from God through signs, it then reaffirms the ultimate purpose that Jesus is calling you to fulfill – to share what you experience with others, like John the Baptist, Andrew, and John. To say to others: "Look!" "Come, and see!" This is what we are called together to do as a church, regardless of what we were looking for when we walked through the door. So continue to look for new ways together that we can point to Jesus, follow his teaching, and say "Come and see" to others who are looking for the same things you were looking for and have found on this walk with Jesus. Amen.