

## *Questions Jesus Asked sermon series*

### *“What Are You Looking For?”*

[John 1:35-42](#)

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus asked many questions - many more than he was asked. In his book, *The Questions of Jesus*, John Dear says Jesus asked 307 different questions across the four Gospels. A different author claims it is 339 questions Jesus asked. Good teachers know the value of asking questions in teaching, and apparently, so did Jesus.

Are you surprised to learn that Jesus asked many more questions than he was asked? I certainly was when it was revealed to me. Most of us grow up believing that religions answer spiritual quests of people and that we, Christians, have the right answers. We know the way. And, that’s the message you hear when you turn to TV evangelists or many of the mega church preachers: If you do this, you will be happy. And if you don’t do that, God will punish you...

But, that was not what Jesus did. Instead of giving people answers they were seeking, he asked them questions, a great variety of questions:

- Some of his questions were simple and straightforward: “How many loaves do you have?” (Luke 24:41) while some others were rhetorical and did not require an answer: “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?” (Luke 12:51)
- Some questions were challenging: “If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:46) Others were probing questions: “But, who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29)
- Some questions were convincing: “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25) And, others were convicting: “Do you see this woman?” (Luke 7:44)
- Jesus asked questions that silenced those who tried to trap him: “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” (Luke 14:5) But, other times, he asked questions that made people angry: “... which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” (Luke 6:9)
- And, there were questions that were loaded with emotion, like when he asked his closest disciples: “Could you not keep awake an hour?” (Mark 14:37)

Certainly, asking questions was central to Jesus’ life and ministry. In fact, Jesus’ first recorded words in the Gospel of Luke are in the form of a question. If you recall, Mary and Joseph had lost their 12 year-old son after their annual visit to the Jerusalem Temple. When they finally found him back in the temple courts, Jesus said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus’ last words on the cross were also in the form of a question: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). And in between, he had a question for everyone he met. Even after his resurrection, Jesus continued asking questions of his disciples: To the two disciples who were going to Emmaus, he asked, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” (Luke 24:17); After showing his scars to his disciples, he asked, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” (John 20:29); And, to the one who betrayed him three times, he asked, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

During this Lent and Easter, we will reflect on some of the 300 plus questions Jesus asked throughout his ministry. Today, we start with the first question Jesus asked according to John's gospel account: "What are you looking for?" You can find the other questions we will consider in the back of today's worship bulletin. I would like to acknowledge John Dear and Martin Copenhaver for their books, *Questions of Jesus* and *Jesus Is the Question* that inspired this sermon series.

"What Are You Looking For?" According to the Gospel of John, Jesus asked this question in three different places. The first time was in the beginning of his ministry as today's scripture reading shows. The day after John the Baptist baptized Jesus, John was standing with a couple of his disciples. He saw Jesus walking by and told them, "Look! The Lamb of God!" Then, John's disciples left their teacher and began to follow Jesus, instead. When Jesus noticed John's disciples were following him, he turned around and asked them, "What are you looking for?"

The second time was on the night when a group of soldiers came to arrest him. Jesus asked them a variation of the same question: "Who are you looking for?" And the third time was on the morning of his resurrection. Jesus asked Mary, who was crying outside his tomb, "Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

What or who are you looking for? This can be either a very simple or significant question all depending on the context in which it is asked. For instance, when you are at a clothing store, and a clerk asks you, "What are you looking for?" Or when you walk into a medical building and the receptionist at the front desk asks you, "Who are you looking for?," in these circumstances, the what or who you are looking for is a simple question that you can easily answer.

But, from the lips of Jesus, this is not a simple question. When he asks us, "Who or What are you looking for?," it is a profound question that goes to the core of who we are. Do you know what you are looking for? For many of us, perhaps most of us, this is precisely the problem. We often do not know what it is that we are looking for. And it looks like this was the case for the two disciples of John the baptist. They had the same problem. They did not give Jesus an answer to his question but asked him where he was staying. They did not know what they were looking for, though they were longing and searching for it. And by asking Jesus where he was staying, they were telling him that they were willing try to find their answer through him.

About looking for something that we do not even know, Copenhaver offers in his book an illustration many of us can relate to:

*You pad into the kitchen, go directly to the refrigerator, open the door and peer in. You are vaguely hungry, but you cannot tell exactly what you are hungry for. You survey the options. Cheese? No, that's not it. Cold sausage pizza? No, definitely not. Leftover salad? That's not quite it. You go so far as to take a bit of strawberry yogurt but put it back on the shelf. The refrigerator is full enough, and your stomach is empty enough, but nothing seems exactly right. The cold air emerges and brings with it the remembered voice of your mother. "Don't leave the refrigerator door open." So, you close the door and wait for the cold air to dissipate and the voice to fade. Then, you open the refrigerator again, lean on the door, and stare blankly at the options, hoping that one will finally beckon and fully satisfy.*

You might remember the band U2 from the late 80's and their hit song, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." The band's lead singer Bono sings, "I have climbed the highest mountains, I have run through the fields. Only to be with you. Only to be with you. I have run. I have crawled. I have scaled these city walls. These city walls. Only to be with you. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

Does this song sound like your story? Perhaps it is a confession for all of us, at least at some point in our lives.

Copenhaver further writes:

*Many of us spend our lives like that, with indistinctive longings we don't know how to satisfy. We yearn for something and know not what. We try a bit of this and that, for a time or perhaps only in our imaginations, but nothing is quite right or enough to satisfy. You can never get enough of that which does not satisfy. So often, we don't know what we want and then are disappointed when we don't get it.*

What is it we are looking for in our lives? What is it we want? The truth is that, like the two of John's disciples who followed Jesus, we do not always know what we are looking for, though we know there is a deep longing in our hearts.

"What are you looking for?" As you go through this week, would you allow Jesus to ask you the question he asked his first followers? As we begin this season of Lent, a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal, would you dwell with this fundamental question, the question which goes to the very heart of who we are and perhaps where we are? 'What is it that I am looking for at this point in my life?' 'What do I truly desire?' And if the answer does not arise, if you still do not know what you are looking for, know that you are in good company. Because this was the case with Jesus' first followers.

And like them, maybe it's enough that we're willing to sit with the question, willing to live with it ringing in our ears and in our hearts. And, as we live in the question, carefully paying attention, examining our lives, our everyday living, maybe we will begin to see some gaps appearing. Space between what you spend your hours looking for and what actually satisfies your heart. Perhaps we can even invite people in, people closest to you - your family, friends, and coworkers you feel comfortable with - what they think you are looking for. And see if their answers align with what you think.

John Dear writes:

*"If we can sit with this question for days and weeks, we will discover, perhaps to our astonishment, that we are not looking for money, power, fame, or control. We are really looking for love, goodness, truth, peace, happiness, justice, mercy and joy. We are looking for meaning. We are looking for God. We are looking for Jesus."*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, hear the good news. The question that we are asked to sit with, "Who or what are you looking for?," are not words of rebuke or condemnation. They are an invitation. They are an invitation to come to him, to make our home in Jesus Christ, to find our refuge in him. For he is the Prince of peace, and he will give us rest for our weary souls. And as much as we are seeking after him, he is seeking after us. Thanks be to God!