



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE REV. CANON CRISTI CHAPMAN, CANON FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND STEWARDSHIP  
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPHIPHANY, JANUARY 19, 2020  
ISAIAH 49:1-7; PSALM 40:1-12; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9; JOHN 1:29-42

## OPENING QUESTIONS?

**John 1:29-42:** *[John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 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.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”]*

*The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 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?” 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). 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).]*

One of the strangest interviews I attended started this way. After exchanging pleasantries, Amy, who was the interviewer, asked me if I had any questions. Her opening move was not what I expected, and, honestly, it stumped me. I asked her to repeat her question, and then I wondered if this were her way of ending the interview before we got started. In my experience, the person *being* interviewed was not the one to run the

interview. Instead, candidates would be given time for their questions at the end, after all of the other important information had been exchanged. But that was not Amy’s plan that day, and once I figured that out, I regained some of my composure and asked my questions.

Jesus likes to start with the questions, too. In fact, in John’s gospel, the very first time Jesus

says anything, he poses a question. “What are you looking for?” he asks the two who follow him. “What are you looking for?” he asks all of us.

This is no ordinary question from Jesus. It is a question borne out of God’s deep desire for the human family. It is also a question that reveals what is at the heart of God.

In every chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus practices God’s mercy and compassion. With the man confined to the mat for 38 years, the man born blind, and Mary at the empty tomb, Jesus shows up and stays with each of them through their suffering. Even at his trial and crucifixion, God’s mercy flows through Jesus. His willingness to show up and be present in the midst of his own suffering is another act of compassion. Nothing, not even hell, can escape the caring presence of God.

That’s not all that Jesus’s question reveals. When Jesus encounters these two in the Gospel, he wants to know what their deepest desires are. He wants to know what their hearts long for. Their answer is simple. Show us where you are staying. Show us where you abide, so we may know that God is in our midst. Jesus offer an invitation, and when they respond, their whole world changes. They transform from mere followers to full disciples.

Our discipleship begins with a similar question. The baptismal rite and related liturgies like confirmation and ordination include some form of examination. This examination is not posed as a way to trip up candidates. Nor are the questions a series of checkboxes that must be completed before moving on to the good parts of the liturgies. Instead, the examination is an expression of the deep longing within every human being. The questions themselves give voice to the desire of God that wells up within each one of us. They are another way Jesus shows up and asks us, “What are you looking for?”

Last week at the 9am service, three children were baptized. Often, parents and sponsors will speak on behalf of their children when it comes time to answer those questions. But last Sunday was different, because all three kids at 9 wanted to speak for themselves. When Mae, Lewis, and Calvin stood together, I was mesmerized. Under normal circumstances, it is not easy to stand up here and talk in front of 300 people. How much more so for a six, seven, and ten-year-old. What courage it must have taken for them to publicly express their desire to be a part of the Body of Christ and to promise to live as Jesus teaches us. What courage it must take for any of us, for that matter.

Later as I reflected, the Dean reminded me of something. Those children did not make

their promises on their own. God was right there with them, and with all of us, bringing something new into being. That's why children who are old enough to speak for themselves are invited to do so at their baptisms. That's also why everyone who is old enough to eat is invited to this table to participate in the Eucharist. We are not gatekeepers of the sacraments. Instead, we trust that God is at work through those sacraments.

While these children may have spoken for themselves, they were not the sole agents of what was happening. None of us is. God invites all of us to participate in the ongoing life of creation, but it is God who initiates that effort, not us. God is at the center, not us.

And that's what these two in the Gospel longed to see: the living God abiding in their midst. When they see Jesus, they don't just see another human being. They discover the very being of God in human form, actively present in the healing and reconciliation of the world and calling them to participate in that work.

That's when their discipleship took on a new, visceral meaning. It no longer is an intellectual exercise, but one that stems from the heart and one whose meaning was based on encounter. Once they come and see, there

is no stopping these two. That's when their conversion starts. That's when their Christian discipleship begins.

That pattern was not isolated only to the characters we hear about this morning. We see it throughout John's Gospel: with Philip and Nathanel; with the Samaritan woman at the well; with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany; and with Mary at the empty tomb. They encounter Jesus, and something changes. That change then compels them to respond in some new way, to share what's possible for the wider world, and then to work to make that new possibility a reality.

That pattern continues today with us.

As some of you know, a group from Saint Mark's traveled to the Texas-Mexico border last week. We will hear more from them about their trip on February 9th. Before then, Canon Ross wanted to give us a preview about their time there. "Five people from this community went to the border and had their hearts broken open by more than 2,000 people. All of them have been waiting for months in a tent city in Matamoros for their rights under international law -- and their basic human rights -- to be honored. We are changed and fired up."<sup>1</sup> That's what happens when you encounter Jesus. That's what real transformation is about. It is one example.

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<sup>1</sup>From a text exchange with Nancy Ross on January 16, 2020.

There are many more from our common life together, from creation care to the Front Door Ministry to small group gatherings.

God also encounters each of us in simple ways. Maybe it is through an anthem you hear that stirs the deepest parts of your being. Maybe it is the gaze of another person that helps you realize you both are beloved. Or maybe it is the time you watch courageous people say yes to God, and you are reminded how to say yes for yourself. Every encounter holds the possibility for transformation. Every encounter is an invitation to live more fully as disciples of Jesus.

There's one more thing to remember, especially this weekend when this country honors Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We

engage in this work not for ourselves, but for the Holy One who dwells in each one of us. Until the justice that God longs for all people is a reality, we cannot give up our search. We cannot stop answering Jesus's question. We cannot rest on what has already happened. We cannot rely on the passage of time to bring about the full reign of God. God will not settle for anything less. Neither should we. Until then, Jesus will keep showing up and asking each of us, "What are you looking for?" May we have the courage to keep answering and the heart to keep acting, now and always.

AMEN.



*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*