

What Are You Looking For?

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The first words that Jesus the Word of God speaks in John's Gospel are directed to two prospective disciples sent to him by John the Baptist. Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" At the beginning of any spiritual journey, it is important to ask what it is that we seek and desire to find. There will inevitably be surprises along the way. But without a goal, however vague it may be, there can be no journey and no finding a home.

The two prospective disciples' initial response is awkward and even embarrassed. They ask Jesus in turn, "Where are you staying?" We can presume that the two prospective disciples were looking for what most of us are looking for from a religious teacher like Jesus: a personal relationship with God, a framework for understanding human existence, a sense of moral purpose and direction, an experience of community and a reason for hope.

In response to their query, Jesus offers an invitation and a promise: "Come, and you will see." The spiritual journey with Jesus is not for those with short attention spans. It demands attentiveness, commitment, patience and fidelity. The prospective disciples will have to find out what kind of person Jesus is and what he stands for, and they will have to confront the mystery of the Cross.

The first chapter in John's Gospel serves as an overture or preface to the narratives of Jesus' public activity (the Book of Signs) and his passion, death and resurrection (the Book of Glory). It features a series of titles applied to Jesus that range from the Word of God to the glorious Son of Man. John 1:35-42 includes three of these titles that can help in answering the question, "What are you looking for?"

Jesus is the Lamb of God. The image evokes the animals offered as sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple, the Passover lamb, and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, who is led like a lamb to the slaughter. Those who follow Jesus are looking for right relationship with God, and they will find that such a relationship has been made possible through the paschal mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Jesus is the teacher (rabbi). Those who follow Jesus look for wisdom, and they can find it in Jesus' teachings and example. Rooted in the sapiential traditions of his people, Jesus offers wise teachings about God, the human condition, ethics and practically everything else of lasting importance.

Jesus is the messiah. This title evokes hope, since it expresses Israel's hope for a perfect leader who might lead them to glory and bring about the fulfillment of God's promises to his people. The prospective disciples began their journey on the basis of the testimony of John the Baptist. Having stayed with Jesus and having come to know him, they go and announce exuberantly to Simon Peter, "We have found the messiah." In their search for right relationship with God, wisdom and hope, they are off to a good start on their spiritual journey and want to share it with others.

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