Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42

**January 15, 2017; Second Sunday after Epiphany**

**Caroline M. Kelly**

What are you looking for?

I don’t know about you but I’ve spent most of my life trying to answer that question, in one way or another. Just so we’re clear, I don’t mean the question someone asks me every time I start looking for my phone or my keys. I mean the deeper meaning conveyed by the original Greek: What are you seeking? What do you need?

For most of us, that question surfaces whenever we are faced with a significant transition in life. Should I go to college? Should I take this job? Should I marry this person? Should I have children? Should I move away from home? Should I join this church? Should I retire? You get the picture.

What are you looking for? What do you seek? What do you need?

I’m amazed how many high school seniors seem confident enough of that answer to announce their college major even before they graduate from high school. I used every bit of my first two years in college to figure it out. What was I looking for? There were times when I had no idea.

When I graduated with a degree in political science, I moved to D.C. and started working on Capitol Hill. It took only two years for me to realize that that was not what I was looking for. It was not what I was seeking. It was not what I needed, so I decided to try law school instead.

I loved law school more than anything I had ever done, but after four years as a lawyer with a top-tier firm, my love affair with the legal practice ended, too.

When I decided to apply to seminary, one of my mother’s first responses was to ask if medical school was next. I had to admit that being a student was one of my favorite things in life, but no, I said, this is it. *This* is what I’ve been looking for. *This* is what I am seeking. *This* is what God is calling me to do.

It’s notable that John’s account of Jesus’ ministry begin with this question, not with a mighty command to silence a demon, as in Mark; nor with a sermon to the crowds who have gathered on a mountain, as in Matthew; and not with a quotation from Isaiah to proclaim his anointing for the year of God's favor, as in Luke, but … with [this] question: "What are you seeking?" What are you looking for? What do you need?[[1]](#footnote-1)

John’s testimony is so compelling that two of his own disciples approach Jesus to check him out. When they do, Jesus questions them. What are you looking for?

It’s as if Jesus is saying, “Do you know who I am? Do you know what you are getting yourself into? Do you really want to do this thing?”

John calls Jesus the Lamb of God, not once but twice, the only place in the Bible where Jesus is specifically identified this way. Scholars don’t agree on the significance of the term, but there are a variety of ways it might have been understood by those who first heard it.

Scott Hoezee, Director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Seminary writes:

Lambs are often a symbol of gentleness, meekness, and vulnerability. In this sense, calling Jesus a lamb could have been a nice thing to say, but it would hardly be the type of description that would fit the Messiah. … In Jesus’ day, because there was that long history in Israel of using lambs as sacrifices, there was another sense in which hearing Jesus called “a lamb” might have struck some people as cruel. Maybe it would be like today calling someone a “turkey” or a “dumb bunny.” It does make you wonder what the disciples thought when they decided to hitch their wagon to this particular “star.”   Was Jesus going places or going nowhere?

Whether John’s title meant Jesus was very meek or that he was destined for the chopping block, either way it didn’t seem to indicate Jesus would be very effective in the long run. Nice guys finish last and sacrificial lambs are just finished eventually…

This isn’t the kind of thing you’d say about someone who was on his way to the top of this world’s heap. This isn’t how you’d describe a celebrity on a red carpet or a politician on his way to the platform where he had just been nominated for president.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In a sermon he delivered just two months before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the human desire for achievement the “drum major instinct.”[[3]](#footnote-3) “We all want to be important, to surpass others, to achieve distinction, to lead the parade.”[[4]](#footnote-4) But unchecked, this instinct causes us “to push others down in order to push [ourselves] up.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Speaking of his own eulogy, King said:

I’d like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I’d like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day, that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day, that I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice, say that I was a drum major for peace, say that I was a drum major for righteousness.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Jesus asks us, “What are you looking for? What are you seeking? What do you need in your life?

If what you are looking for is a life of fortune and fame, then you don’t want to follow this lamb.

If what you want is privilege and status, reward and self-satisfaction, then you don’t want to follow this lamb.

But if you are seeking loving relationships with God and neighbor, a life of compassion and mercy, of service and sacrifice, of purpose and meaning, then come and see.

Come and see what a life of loving God and neighbor can look like.

Come and see what a life of compassion and mercy can look like.

Come and see what a life of service and sacrifice can look like.

Come and see what a life of purpose and meaning can look like.

Come, follow the lamb.

Come and see.

1. # Audrey West, “Commentary on John 1:29-42” from [*Preaching This Week*](http://www.workingpreacher.org/?lect_date=01/15/2017&lectionary=rcl) at [Working Preacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org/), Luther Seminary, 2017.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2. Scott Hoezee, “Gospel Commentary: John 1:29-42” http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/epiphany-2a, January 9, 2017.

   3. “The Drum Major Instinct”: A sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, on February 4, 1968, www.thekingcenter.org.

   4. Ibid.

   5. Ibid.

   6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)