

## Epiphany 2 Year A 2020

When I was in my discernment process about entering the Carmelite Monastery – in my early twenties – Betty, the prioress, gave me a portion of today’s Gospel passage to pray with as I started my retreat. It cuts to the core – asks the important questions.

“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.”

What are you looking for? “What are you seeking?” Jesus asks. And the two disciples of John respond with a question of their own: “Where are you staying?” Our translation does not really capture the full meaning of the original. “Where do you *abide*?” would be closer. In other words, the disciples are not looking for an address or location. They are asking a question with more permanence. Where do you *abide*? Where are you *present*? Where can we find you? And Jesus invites them to “Come and See.” And we’re told they remained with him that day. They *abided* with him.

Even in this first chapter of John’s gospel, John the evangelist brings to us one of the words that is a hallmark in this gospel – abide. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. ... Whoever abides in me will bear much fruit.”

Today is the day of our annual meeting. It is a gathering mandated by the canons – or rules – of the church. We come together to take stock, as it were; to see what the past year has held, and plan for the future. But particularly *this* year, our meeting will include reviewing the results of the survey held by the Search Committee, begun last fall. The questions posed in our Gospel for today are essentially the questions we have wrestled with over the past months. Where do we stay? Where do we abide?

Those questions help us see who we are, underneath all the ideas and programs and ideologies and opinions that vary among us. Where do we *abide*? And the answers to that question help us approach the question Jesus poses: *What do you seek? What are you looking for?*

Whether we are twenty-somethings asking that question when our life seems full of possibility open before us, or 60- or 80-somethings asking that same question as we wonder what our lives have been spent on thus far, the question remains. And while the details of our answers may be different, the heart of the *big* answer is common ground. We seek the One who gives meaning to our lives. We ask, “Where do you abide, O Christ?” And then we follow – and in turn, we remain, we *abide* with that One who invites us to “Come and see.”

Those two disciples *found* what they were looking for. And then they were compelled to go tell others. Andrew ran to find his brother Simon to tell him, “We have found the Messiah!” That is why they had left John the Baptizer, of course, when he had pointed to Jesus and said, “There – he is the one I’ve been preaching about!” John the Baptizer told Andrew and the other disciple, Andrew told Simon Peter, and the community of believers thus began and grew, one telling another. Because they had been asked, “What are you looking for?” and they had dared to respond to the invitation of Jesus to “Come and see.” And then they chose to remain with him – to *abide* with him.

It is in fact this abiding that holds the key. Whoever abides in me will bear much fruit, Jesus promises.

That is the same promise we hear in that first reading from Isaiah, if we have ears to hear. The reading speaks of the one who is called by God: “The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.” And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” – But now the kingdom of Israel – and in fact all the tribes – have been scattered. It certainly does not appear that God will be glorified in Israel. We hear Israel say, “But I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;” All seems for nothing. You can almost hear the question: What was I looking for? Is this all there is?

But then comes this:

And now the Lord says,  
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him,  
and that Israel might be gathered to him,  
for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,  
and *my God has become my strength*--  
he says,  
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of *Jacob*  
and to restore the survivors of *Israel*;  
I will give you as a light to the *nations*,  
that my salvation may reach to the *end* of the earth."

God says, "Yes, I have called you. But to a much more inclusive vision than you had." It's not just about *your* people. Everyone is a part of this vision of God. And when God has become our strength – when we are *abiding* in God – then we are given as a light to the nations. That is, then our tribe, our community, includes everyone. Because that is where God abides.

Listen again to what Paul said to the church in Corinth: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind-- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift." Paul is not speaking to any single person. The "you" here is plural. No one has *every* spiritual gift. But what he *is* saying is that, as *community*, we are not lacking in any spiritual gift. We have what we need. We are only *without* what we need if we exclude the gifts of others. That is part of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom we honor specially tomorrow, that we do well to remember. *We need one another*. We cannot "other" *anyone* else without suffering a loss in the body of Christ. And the Body of Christ is who we are.

It is not unlike the story I told a few weeks ago, of the dwindling community of monks whose lives changed when they dared believe that the Messiah was among them. When we live as ones abiding with Christ, then others will want to know, “Where do you stay?” and we can say, “Come and see!”

Much as we prayed in the opening Collect, I pray for us: “Holy God, Grant that this, your people of St. John’s, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may indeed shine with the radiance of Christ's presence, as we seek to serve Christ in all persons.”

Amen.

- [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)
- [John 1:29-42](#)
- [Psalms 40:1-12](#)