

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God over all creation, our world is so beautiful and yet so wounded at the same time. We name beauty all around us, and yet when we turn on the news or pick up the phone now and then, we get word of tragedy and struggle. We name you in the presence of the good and the bad, the wonderful and the difficult. Walk with us through all of these times and to lift You in the midst of them. We pray for your presence with those among us, those we know, and those we do not and will never know, who ail and who struggle with real oppression, lacking the evidence of hope. Hear all our prayers here and the prayers of your people around the world. Lord, indeed, be among us today and always.

We hear in the words of scripture a calling through three statements, of “What are you looking for?” “Rabbi, where are you staying?” and “Come and see.” We are called to name what in life we truly seek above all, we consistently ask and wonder where we might find relationship with you and with our neighbor and what that means. Jesus tells us, “Come and See,” which is a calling to relationship and all the responsibility and growth that requires. We heed the calling to dwell with you and one another, which sounds so easy yet becomes so hard at the same time. Help these questions and statements to dwell in us richly as we seek to dwell with you and each other richly, joyfully but with responsibility. We pray all these things in the name of the one we look for and who looks for us, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying...

SERMON

This is a big day; the Broncos are meeting the Patriots in the AFC Title Game for the right to move on to the Super Bowl. Let's be honest, today, I'm guessing that many of you have in the back of your minds, or, well, maybe front and center, a Broncos victory. Hey,

who doesn't want to go to the Super Bowl? That 1:00 kickoff is coming up quickly, and you're probably thinking about your logistics. You might be staying home to watch the game; you might be going to a friend's house. You might have friends coming over, or at the end of the game, you might be on the phone with a friend to celebrate or commiserate the results. On the other hand, you might be saying "Hooey!" with all this football stuff. Instead, you might be getting together with some other friends after church for a nice meal or giving some friends or family members a call. In other words, many of you are probably subconsciously making plans about how the rest of your day will shape up in relation to other people. You may live alone or with others, and yet we need to commune with our neighbors, whether they are here or miles away. We have an indwelt need to be with one another, to care for one another, and to be real with one another. I believe this was created within us; we must live into it in order to be faithful. Jesus calls us toward that goal.

Each Gospel has its own shape of the beginning; the Gospel of John is more unique than the other three. Here we have the entrance of the man Jesus with commentary by John the Baptist. He does his very best to name Jesus as "the Lamb of God, the one who takes away the sins of the world!" In this version, John prompts the disciples to follow him. They quickly do, and Jesus takes notice. What follows is a dialogue that speaks not just about this current journey, but life altogether. These are three statements, each worth discussing in length: "What are you looking for?" asks Jesus. The disciples respond: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Jesus finally responds: "Come and see." In this conversation is consequence. Let's look at each and see how they show us how to be people of faith.

For three consecutive days, John the Baptist proclaims Jesus' Lordship. Two of those times he sees Jesus walking by. On the third day of his proclamation, two of John's

disciples are with him, and they heed John's proclamations and follow Jesus. He sees these new followers and asks them, "What are you looking for?" This first statement is a question of purpose, digging to find substance. Other translations may say, "What do you want?" The New Interpreter's Commentary says this question has literal and symbolic significance, and I quite agree. Not just, "Why are you walking behind me?" but "What do you want from this life?" This question is not only relevant for the two disciples following the Lamb of God, but it is poignant for us too, a question that strikes at the heart of why we come here.

What are you looking for? What do you want? This seems like a limited question in this context, but Jesus is shooting bigger. Jesus wants to get down to the nitty-gritty, and so should we. Ask yourself. This morning, this moment, this hour, this day, this month, this year, this decade... "What are you looking for?" We're always looking for something; sometimes we know it on the tip of our tongues. Other times, we have to sit a long time to put words to feelings. Inner peace. A better house. Acceptance of ourselves; acceptance of others. More substance in our wallets. To be remembered. A Broncos Super Bowl victory. Jesus is calling them and us to name what we need...what we really are looking for in our heart of hearts. The answer is always changing in our minds, and, at the same time, it doesn't. Some of those we get through the work of our hands. More often, that is secondary to the more important focuses in life: we deeply want to be loved by one another and to love in return. We want true relationship. We need a greater focus on this, with our Lord Jesus Christ and with one another, to more fully meet the deep needs. When we recognize our inability to find what we really are looking for by ourselves, we must dig more deeply into how we live and work with one another. I think this is what drives so much of life and what we look for in this world, in this very place, the church, and with our

Creator. The disciples name this need in themselves; they are not looking for temporary, fleeting things in their hearts. Real relationship is what these disciples are looking for.

“Rabbi, where are you staying?” Their question betrays what they want. This second question is a statement of intention. They are looking to dwell with the teacher. But dwelling is not a passive idea; to dwell is to be in relationship with the Lamb of God. If Jesus is looking for the right answer, I think this is it. According to the podcast Sermon Brainwave, this relationship is the point of this passage and, really, one of the greatest points of the Gospel of John. John 1:14 sets the tone for the Gospel: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” The word “lived” is better translated as “dwelled,” fully lived with. This is to be in relationship. The idea of sin throughout the Gospel of John, according to the New Interpreter’s Commentary, is not individual failures but the lack or unwillingness to be in relationship with the Light who has come into the world. Jesus takes away the sins of the world because he comes to know us and invites the world to know him in response. This Light dwelled with us, and we, in turn, need to dwell with it. These disciples get it. They ask the correct, difficult question by wondering where they should go, for they know it is not only the intention of being in relationship but ALSO work of following.

The answer validates the question, which resounds so much with the overall message of Jesus and the Gospel of John. This final statement is an invitation to fullness. Responding to their requests to understand where he lives, where he dwells, in other words, to be in relationship, he gives an invitation: “Come and See.” They ask for relationship in word and deed, and Jesus responds. In other words, in the spirit of their

request, God's gonna be and move with us, but we've also got to move our own cabooses to get to the place where we can dwell with God and each other. It's harder than it sounds.

This is a faithful question by the disciples, and it is validated by Jesus' answer, but it is a hard question to take ahold of and make it a part of our lives. We struggle with relationship, with each other and with our Creator. Sometimes we don't know how to live with Jesus as an ongoing part of our lives, beyond the happiness of knowing Jesus loves us. God seems to dwell sometimes near and sometimes far. We each can find God in places and times when we most feel attuned with the power of the Spirit, but those can be few and far between. The work of relationship with Jesus is when we not only pray, sing the songs, and attend worship. The work of relationship with Jesus is when we dig into the hardest things he teaches. We are members of the Body of Christ, the worldwide family that nurtures one another. In that spirit and in the spirit of this passage, we are at our best with God when we dwell, when we live in relationship with one another in Christ's name. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am with them," says Jesus. Here, we find this in practice.

The disciples come and see where he dwells, but that means they also dwell with him and one another in his presence. I don't think we can underestimate how important this idea is, to dwell richly with God and with each other. Actually, we can say that to dwell with Jesus and our neighbor seems easy, but I'm afraid of lovey-dovey, easy relationship. We can quickly water down or cheapen what this means by thinking dwelling with Jesus means recognizing Jesus loves and cares for us, but that's only one side of a double-edged proposition. Jesus requires accountability. When we dwell with someone or many people, whether that be family or even a roommate, it requires responsibility. To dwell with the other requires us to take a good look at ourselves, to improve, to grow through the strains

of relationship. We have to clean up after ourselves, we have to take care of ourselves, we have to serve the other well. If that's the case with anyone else, how much more so with Jesus and with our Christian brothers and sisters! Relationship, when done with honesty and intentionality, requires we go to our deepest selves and sometimes recognize that we need to change some things to dwell well with others. Jesus calls us to validate ourselves as blessed, but not to validate that we are completed projects. We come here not just because we want to worship but because we are called to continually learn the stories, learn the ideas, and go forth to put them into action. We come to be in relationship with other and with our Lord through the work of the faith. True relationship is work. It takes a lifetime, if even then, to learn how to live well with the tenets of our faith and each other.

“What are you looking for?” We each have our needs and questions, but many of them focus on the need to be with one another in honest relationship. “Rabbi, where are you staying?” We are all on our journeys to know God and where God dwells richly. “Come and see.” The invitation calls us to the wondrous but difficult responsibility of true relationship, for true relationship loves but requires change and growth. In whatever ways we connect, we open ourselves completely to dwell together. The miracle of the Gospel of John is that Jesus came to dwell with us; Jesus came to be in relationship with the righteous and the unrighteous, the wanted and the unwanted. In our Christian walks, we are called to do the same, and to be changed by the experience when we dwell with the other and with Christ. Those journeys should change us. Remember to dwell with one another at all times, whether that be around a TV with coverage of the Broncos game, or around a delicious meal, or just feeding on conversation, and God will be there when we dwell richly. Thanks be to God for God's calling to dwell as God dwelled with us! Amen and Amen.