

John 1:35-42

The First Disciples of Jesus

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).

(New Revised Standard Version)

Dear Congregation!

In the beginning was the Word. – These are the opening words of the Gospel of John. But at the beginning there was also – a question. *What do you seek?* (“*What are you looking for?*”)

This question is asked during a seemingly coincidental meeting between John the Baptist, two of his disciples and Jesus. Jesus asks it and directs his question at the two disciples who happen to pass by. But they answer with a counter-question: “Rabbi, where do you live?” Upon which Jesus replies: “Come and see!” At first glance, this seems to be quite a random occurrence which John reports in his Gospel. A rather unspectacular meeting at the side of the road. And yet: there is much more behind it.

What do you seek? Where do you live? – And then the reply: Come and see! This is a story of searching, such as we find a number in the Gospels:

Whom are you looking for? – Jesus asks this on the Mount of Olives when the armed soldiers approach him to arrest him.

Whom are you looking for? – asks the angel on Easter morning when the grieving women approach the grave of Christ.

We could ask the shepherd *who* leaves his 99 sheep alone to search for the one that has got lost: *Why are you looking for it?*

What are we searching for on our journey through life?

Are we even searching? – We are in transit, we are on the road. We never reach our goal. When we wander through time, we may look for interim goals – or hope to find new opportunities. Sometimes we wait and hope that something new will crop up, that we meet new people.

But we never ever finally reach our goal. We never really arrive and can say that we have finally found what we are looking for. That is simply part of being human. And so, we are constantly seeking, searching. – Sometimes we don't even realize it – and then we are overjoyed when we find something for a while: such as in moments of fulfilment, moments of real happiness, in moments of deep gratitude, in times of peace and quiet.

What are we searching for? – in dicey situations and in times of transition: such as at the birth of a child – or when someone's life comes to an end – or when new phases in one's life begin? Suddenly then immense questions arise – and for a moment, eternity breaks into our lives.

We seek meaning and purpose in our lives. I don't want to live in vain. I want everything that I am, that I live and have lived for to be embraced by a great sense of meaning. I want my life to be safe in God's eternity forever.

What are you seeking? – Jesus asks the two disciples who follow him and want to go with him. – And they counter with the question: *Rabbi, Master, where do you live?* Martin Luther translated it with ,Where is your refuge? “In other words: Where is your home?

To have a home. Nothing is more important for the development of a child than a good home. And we adults also need nothing more than a safe, caring, protecting home, even though we are constantly on the move.

Where is your home? A very well-known and moving picture in the Bible is that of the Prodigal Son who makes his way home after a time of confusion and disillusionment in the great wide world. He goes home because he still knows where his home is. And there is his father, standing in front of the house, waiting – and then he runs out to meet his returning son. The windows of the house are illuminated – his father’s house is occupied, it has been lived in right through his prolonged period of absence.

Where are we at home? We recognize more and more the hidden depth of the conversation between Jesus and the disciples. It’s not only about the roof over our heads. It’s about really being at home, about all that which gives our lives meaning and purpose and which also gives us the confidence to leave the house now and then. The idea of home, of refuge, encompasses a far deeper truth.

Rabbi, Master, where is your home? In another place in the Gospel Jesus says that foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay down his head. His home is nowhere on this earth. And yet: like no other, his refuge is God; in his unconditional love; in the house of his Father. There are many dwellings in God’s House – for Jesus and for all who follow him.

Master, where is your home? And he replied: *Come and see!* No more and no less. – And they

came and they saw, and they stayed with him for the rest of the day.

What would the disciples have seen by the end of the day? – What would they have talked about? – We are not told. This remains secret. We only hear that, after they had come and seen, they spoke to Simon Peter and declared: *We have found the Messiah.* They had found the Saviour, the Healer. They had found the refuge in which they were completely at home.

And we? What we have just heard and read does not provide us with a GPS which could give us absolute clarity on where to go. With this story of searching and finding the way, the evangelist John shows us that the way to find truth and life – and the meaning and purpose that we all seek, is not like receiving a clear direction. The way to our real home cannot be described in advance, as on a GPS. No, everyone must go and see for himself, must make his own discoveries, must go and look for that which helps him on his way through life.

But, in the same way as the disciples went on their way, past Jesus, without at first knowing him, so will we also often go past him until somebody points him out to us, as John did: *“There is the Lamb of God!”* The disciples’ companion made them take note of him and then Jesus spoke to them, chatted to them and they eventually recognized the truth: that in Jesus they had found their Messiah. There was no predefined path that led them to see the truth, no prescribed guidelines. No, it was only afterwards, after their meeting with Jesus, after questions, after searching and wanting to find answers, that the disciples recognized their Messiah in this Jesus.

That makes me think of Moses who stood before the burning bush and asked: *Who are you? What is your name?*

And then received a rather strange answer: *“I am who I am.”* You can know me and my name – but you must walk the path yourself – and ask

and seek. There is no prescribed way to meet me. Keep searching. - And look back after me to see what I have done. Interpret afterwards what you have experienced - and take time to see how it all relates back to me.

Our life is a long, long journey.

The disciples of John who later became the disciples of Jesus, take us by the hand, just as they did with Simon Peter, and say: *Come - and see for yourself.* Look back on what you have experienced. Look back at what made you happy. Look back at those moments of deep happiness and fulfilment, when you were absolutely at peace. - God was there with you! Look back at those who gave you their love and friendship - without your ever having earned it. God is present in the other person who became your neighbour. Look back at those moments in which you made other people happy. Look back at him who made those moments of human happiness possible.

The Kingdom of God can only be found like this. By getting up and walking, searching and asking. - And by discovering time and again that in this or that experience, at this or that moment, heaven opened for me - *and I saw and realized where my home is.*

An insignificant meeting along the road? No, we recognize that the story that the evangelist John tells us is anything but insignificant. It is a story full of depth, wisdom, experience of life and of faith. God was with you. God is with you. The Kingdom of God is amongst you. *Come and see!*

Jesus said: *I am the way, the truth and the life.*

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen