

## Why Are You Looking For Jesus?

Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, August 2, 2009

John 6:22-35 (TEV)<sup>22</sup>Next day the crowd which had stayed on the other side of the lake realized that there had been only one boat there. They knew that Jesus had not gone in it with his disciples, but that they had left without him. <sup>23</sup>Other boats, which were from Tiberias, came to shore near the place where the crowd had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. <sup>24</sup>When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into those boats and went to Capernaum, looking for him. <sup>25</sup>When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said to him, “Teacher, when did you get here?”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, “I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him.”

<sup>28</sup>So they asked him, “What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?”

<sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, “What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent.”

<sup>30</sup>They replied, “What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

<sup>32</sup>“I am telling you the truth,” Jesus said. “What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

<sup>34</sup>“Sir,” they asked him, “give us this bread always.”

<sup>35</sup>“I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty.”

Every now and then my sermon title is in the form of a question. For example, in February I asked, “Who is Elijah?” The sermon gave the answer to the question, not only telling who he was in Scripture, but encouraging us to look to his ministry to guide us in our challenges today. In March I asked the question, “How Can This Be?” as a way to stimulate us to think about the mystery of God’s ways. Today the question is for you – for each one of us, a question we might use to examine our own faith.

There are so many places in Scripture where asking the “why” question helps to give us a deeper understanding of what was happening and what God wants us to learn. For example, why did the Israelite people complain so much to God when they were in the wilderness? After all, they were free from slavery, they were away from their oppressors. Why did they think God had to feed them? Couldn’t they do anything for themselves?

Or have you ever asked, “why did those wise men come searching for Jesus? All records indicate they were not even Jewish – why would they care about a Messiah? And speaking of why – why did Herod want to see baby Jesus so badly? We know that there was a malicious motive at the bottom of his desire, an evil motive that even the Wise Men were made aware of, so that they didn’t go back to him, but went home a different way.

The “Why” question that comes to us from Scripture today is “Why am I looking for Jesus?” Am I looking for something? Do I want Jesus to meet my needs? Or am I sincerely looking for the joy of being with Jesus, having Jesus as a friend? Let’s consider some of these people in Scripture who were looking for Jesus.

Why, for example, was Herod looking for the baby Jesus? When King Herod heard about the birth of Jesus, we are told in Matthew 2:3, he was frightened. The Greek word translated here as “frightened” is the same word translated in the King James version as “troubled.” It could also be translated “anxious,” “vexed” or “distressed.” I think we could say that Herod was afraid of the change that might come, especially about what he would lose - namely his kingdom, his power and prestige. Aren’t we afraid of change, too, especially if we think we are going to lose something in the transition? How many people do you think have

gone searching for Jesus when they were afraid of losing something? Maybe they begin to pray when they are about to lose a job. Or they come back to the church looking for Jesus when illness strikes, or when a loved one dies. The greater the sense of loss, or imminent loss, the harder we search for Jesus to come and meet our needs

Of course, Jesus is always ready to listen when we turn to him. He is more patient, more gracious, more loving than any of us can be. Or else, Jesus might respond, like we sometimes respond to those who just turn up like that, saying, "Why do they only come to the church when they need help?" I can't think like God thinks, but if God did think at all like we do, then isn't it possible that God would say: OK, if he or she only come looking for me when they are having problems, then I guess I better send a whopper of a problem. That way they will turn to me and really open their hearts to me. That is a bit of a frightening thought, and I don't believe God thinks that way. That might be how we would think, but I don't believe God scares people into loving him.

Or how about Mary and Joseph, that time when they took Jesus to Jerusalem and then on the way home they discovered he wasn't with them, so they went back to Jerusalem and had to search for three days before they found him? Why did they go looking for Jesus? The easy answer is to say that they searched for him because they loved him. But we might answer, "They searched for him because they were his parents." You know, it was in their job description, they were responsible for him, it is something you would expect parents to do.

How many times have you come searching for Jesus because you think it is what you ought to do? You know, "If you are a member of this church, you ought to attend." There is nothing wrong with that statement. If your child is lost in the grocery store, at the park, in the city, in Jerusalem, what kind of parent would you be if you didn't go searching? A lousy parent, right? And what kind of Christian are you if you don't go to church, read scripture, pray, search for Jesus? You know the answer. But if you only come to church because you "ought" to be here, your motivation is inadequate.

Then we have the people in the Gospel lesson who came looking for Jesus after he crossed the lake. Jesus saw right through them. They didn't want to learn about God or be friends with Jesus. They wanted their needs met – maybe more food, or healing, or answers to their problems. How often do you go to Jesus to have your needs met. Think about your prayers. How often do you begin, "Lord, I need..." or "Lord, give me..." That is a completely inadequate motivation to search for Jesus. We should search for Jesus, simply to be with him, because we can be with nobody better than Jesus. Jesus longs to have a close personal relationship with each one of us. That is why he came. That is why he endured the cross. That is why he overcame death, so that we too might overcome death, and **be with him**, through all eternity.

So start now. Search for Jesus and you will find that he is searching for you. In the early days of the church, the tradition of teaching in parables, as Jesus taught, was continued. One of those parables was about a young girl who lived with her parents in a cottage at the edge of a forest. "Don't wander too far into the woods," they told her. "You might get lost." A warm summer's day with birds singing and winds calling, however, carried the girl's feet deeper and deeper into the cool underbrush. The shadows were long before she realized how lost she was. Yelling and crying, she dashed one way and the next, not finding home and working herself into convulsions of panic.

Meanwhile, her parents were worried as well. In the dusk of evening they called her name and made forays into the woods. As thoughts of all the worst fates attacked them, they organized villagers and other neighbors into search parties. By dawn the exhausted young girl was sleeping on a bed of pine needles, and only her father was left of the many searchers. As he stumbled into the clearing and saw her, his footsteps broke branches and sent birds twittering. The noise awoke the girl and she saw him. Jumping to her feet she ran toward him, arms outstretched. "Daddy! Daddy!" she cried. "I found you!"

May each one of us continue diligently on our search to find Jesus, and may we find him, as he searches for us. Amen.