

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

=====
This sermon is based around U2's song, "Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," which will be sung just before I preach. Here're the lyrics, lead-in, and message for today:

I have climbed the highest mountains
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you
I have run I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for
I heard grace come from your lips (*edit*)
Felt the healing in the fingertips
It burned like fire
This burning desire
I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night
I was cold as a stone
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for
I believe in the Kingdom come
Then all the colors will bleed into one
Bleed into one
But yes,...

I took an Uber ride to the airport following my ministry conference in Nashville last week. My driver was an African

American gentleman, and we soon fell into a deep theological conversation. It was though Jesus was riding alongside me. Elvis Presley always said that mystical and magical things happened in Memphis and Nashville. Now I think I believe him.

The driver, upon finding out my business in his city, told me that his whole family is “preachers.” And then, as folks are want to do when they find out I am one, he added, “I’m Christian, but I don’t do church. It’s not for me.”

We fell into a silence for a bit, and then he said, “We’re both Christian. I don’t see any use for church. What would you say?” I answered first, without really thinking, in a single word: “Community.”

I thought of you all, our church, and then to Jesus the Uber Driver I said, “We’re both Christian, and I welcome you as my brother in Christ. But I do not yet *know you.*”

From the Gospel of John, the verse first chapter, verses 35:40 in the NRSV Bible:

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ 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?”³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.



WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

There's that guy with the sign again. I see him walking all around Jerusalem carrying that thing. It's like he's stalking me, it's like he's mocking me with every step! I don't know where he comes from each day; I've never seen him around before.

When Jesus would teach the crowds, I never saw him.

When Jesus would heal the sick and the spirit-afflicted, I never saw him.

When Jesus would square off with the scribes and Pharisees, being challenged and tested at every turn, I never saw him.

And when Jesus was arrested, beaten, mocked, and interrogated, where was the man with the sign then?

On one side of the clapboard, he has written in Greek the words, "Jesus Saves." I have no idea what that means! When push came to shove, Jesus didn't save himself! I am in hiding, concealing my identity, scared that I'll be found out. Jesus saves?

What does that mean for him, for us, for any of us, I daresay!

On the other side of the board, the man's writing declares, "Jesus is the Answer." I don't know what that means either. I feel like he is goading me into a confrontation so that I'll out myself and get found out by the authorities. Jesus is the Answer? I used to think so, I used to think so before Good Friday, that is, the blackest Friday of my life, the day my Lord was crucified, and the music stopped.

This man here sings that he "still hasn't found what he's looking for." I can relate. I thought I had found the answer. I thought I knew that, indeed, Jesus is the answer. I was just waiting for him to claim his kingdom, to bring the very wrath of God down on the Romans. I was waiting to be liberated, to be set free by the angels, Jesus' own avenging army summoned from the gates of heaven.

Like others of us, the disciples, we waited, and we watched that dark Friday, expecting Jesus to have the answer to his dilemma. We fully and hopefully expected that he would save himself and in turn, save us.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever been at the absolute low of your life and cried out to God above to send the angels, to vanquish the tormenters, to restore you to good health and life? "C'mon, God," you might say, "come on down off your high and mighty throne and throw a little justice my way, willya? Just a lightning bolt to pierce the heart of my pain, my loneliness! Just a sudden windstorm to blow away my enemy, to clear the decks and make it smooth sailing for me from here on out!"

Haven't you ever said this to God and felt let down that the easy answers don't come to you? I'll bet you have. We all have. That's where I am now. My Lord is lost, and I am lost, and I can't hear or see God through the racket in my head and the smoke in my eyes. My Lord is lost, and I am left with the others with only questions.

You know, Jesus asked us questions all the time. We wanted answers and he answered us—*almost always*—with questions. From the very first encounter he had with his first disciples, he asked questions. I remember that day clear as a bell, though at the time, I was a sideline quarterback—I had not yet entered the game that would become the passion of my life.

Jesus turned to the crowd following him and simply asked, “What are you looking for?” I could not answer. For I had not found what or who I was looking for. Not that day anyway.

It took some time following this extraordinary man around, this question swirling around in my head, before I jumped onto the playing field. And when I did, it was though I had been looking for this opportunity—this *privilege*-all my life.

You didn't get to know Jesus like I did, and for that, I know you all are sorry. It would be so much easier to find what we have been looking for if we can see it, if we could see *him*, in the flesh, standing right before our eyes. I was taught the meaning of faith by the master of faith, but you, you of the 21st century church, you must answer the question, “What are you looking for?” to find your faith.

I had climbed the highest mountains; I had run through the fields. I had sought out God and God's will for my life in every way imaginable, not knowing that what I was really looking for was just to be with him, just to be with him.

I had scaled all the city's walls when he walked by, just to catch a glimpse of him. These city walls, these city walls, just to perhaps be given a look from his eye, a blessing upon my head, a reason for my heart to try another day. Only to be with him, only to be with him.

Once, maybe just once, I had spoken with the tongue of angels. Instead of passing by this old beggar woman I would see every day on my way to the temple square, one day I stopped, and I spoke to her. She cried out, "Please, kind one, please give me what I need!" and I asked her, as I blessed her and gave her my lunch, "What are you looking for?" She simply looked back at me with tired, rheumy eyes. And then with the slightest smile that crept slowly across her face. "Just to *know you*," she said.

Yes, I think that day I spoke with the tongue of an angel. Heaven only knows I have spent enough days being held by the hand of the devil. On those warm nights, I felt cold as a stone. I felt cold as a stone as he asked me over and over in my head, "What are you looking for?" And on those nights, I would cry myself to sleep. I would cry myself to sleep as I would repeat over and over, "I believe in the Kingdom come...for thy will be done, and all these colors need to bleed into one." But then I would drift off into an uneasy sleep wondering, waiting for inspiration, seeking, frustrating myself with his question.

That day he asked the question that changed our lives.

Now we walk these same city streets, hiding, fearing for our lives, and we hear his question still ringing in our ears: "What are you looking for?" You know, it's strange, but I ran into Mary the Magdalene the other day and she told me the wildest tale! I really wanted—*needed*—to hear what she was saying, for she said she had a vision of the risen Jesus! How is this possible?? She said Jesus appeared to her outside the tomb where his lifeless body had been laid to rest, but she thought he was the gardener for the site.

This man asked her a question that when I heard it made the hairs stand up on the back of my neck! For he asked her, "Whom are you looking for?" My God! My Lord! My Jesus!

I so wanted to see him for myself just then. I needed *proof!* I needed *salvation!* I needed to *see him and touch him* and know that he was real! I needed to know that he was real and not just some fantasy I made up in my head to give me a purpose to live and a reason to hope and pray!

In those days, I think I knew what you must go through every day. I was not able to see Jesus again, and you have never been able to walk with him and talk with him except in the garden of your own imagination. Except in your songs sung in longing. Except in your most desperate midnight prayers when you cry out to the living God, "But I want to *see you*, I want to *know you!*"

The question lingers, does it not? Whether I arise each new day on the pages of your bible, the nameless, faceless disciple of Christ who seeks him, or whether it is you who rise as you did on this very Sunday morning. Perhaps it is you who dresses and shaves, who combs your hair and eats your breakfast and who vaguely wonders, "I wonder what I will experience at church today? I wonder who I will see, what I will hear, how I will be changed today?" Perhaps it is you who will be faced with God's question this morn, "What are you looking for?"

No answers. Just questions. Just lots of questions. And lots of Uber-Jesus drivers out there asking the ultimate questions about community and faith and what it means to be a Christian in church. Deep and meaningful conversations when you least expect them.

So, let me channel Jesus for you for just a minute, and ask you, "What are YOU looking for?" I don't want your answer; I just invite you to sit with it, to sit with it in your private God moments, to sit with it as you worship here today. I just invite you to sit with it as you sit with others after worship and enjoy your coffee and treats and conversation, and as you go about your Sunday activities, and as you go to work tomorrow, or to the bridge game or to the gym or to your garden or your library.

Jesus taught me not to be too quick to answer the questions, but to let the questions gestate and bloom into more questions, for

questions and the questioning is how we will come to know *God as God* knows us.

"What are you looking for?" he asked me, and with the asking, my life changed forever.

May it Be So for Us All.