

Squamish United Church  
Rev. Karen Millard  
Epiphany II

January 19, 2020

Scripture:

Isaiah 49:1-7

John 1:29-42

### **What are you looking for?**

I have climbed 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.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly as someone who was in her last years of high school when this song came out nostalgia consumes me when I hear this song. I become homesick for the easier days (even though quite honestly I never want to do high school over) but I hear the lyrics and I find them profound and heartwarming and so so true. (But thats just me).

I was out shovelling snow on with my neighbours Thursday afternoon and the guy across the way said to Doug over at #119 “Isn’t this nostalgic” and Doug said “what?” Mike said “shovelling snow doesn’t it just feel so nostalgic.” “Doug said if this is nostalgia its not something I’m looking for.”

“I still haven’t found what I’m looking for haunted my generation. It asks "What about me? Have I found what I'm looking for?" It probably haunts young people the most, the “twentysomethings” among us, because they are the ones who are most actively searching for three things: a person, a place, and a position. Do you know what I mean? They’re not just looking for a job; they’re looking for a career. And they might wonder where that career will take them. Can they stay where they are or will they have to go somewhere else? And if they go somewhere else will that special someone go with them? Or do they even have a special someone yet? Maybe they still haven’t found what they’re looking for. But the twentysomethings aren’t the only ones asking those questions. Sometimes the thirtysomethings, the fortysomethings, and even the fiftysomethings ask them, too. They pull into the

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<sup>1</sup> “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” U2, 1987.

driveway at the end of a long day and wonder: “Is this it? Is this all there is? Or should I keep looking?”

Many of people in my generation are struggling to get by, even if they have good careers they are working their butts off and it feels like for naught most of the time. These questions run through our minds. You probably won't be surprised if I told you those questions have crossed my mind more than once lately and I am receiving a lot of advice solicited or not on what career path I should take next. I was texting with someone just the other day who said you need to figure out what you want to do and I found myself responding “I know what I want to do.”

“In today's Gospel reading Jesus asks the question directly: "What are you looking for?" And there's the problem. Most of us don't even know. We know we're looking for something. We're fairly sure we haven't found it yet. But we don't know what it is. John the Baptist, on the other hand, knew exactly what he was looking for: he was looking for the Messiah, also known as the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Lamb of God. He had been told that he would find what he was looking for by baptizing, that when the right one arrived the Spirit would descend and remain on him. “I myself did not know him,” John says, “but the one who sent me to baptize with water said, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

Last week we considered the baptism of Jesus and how it reflects on our baptism and our lives today. Interestingly each gospel writer has a slightly different perception of John and Jesus' relationship prior to his baptismal moment. “In this Gospel John the Baptist doesn't know Jesus yet. He has to wait for him to be revealed in baptism. And so he baptizes every person who comes to the Jordan, one at a time. Can't you picture him standing there, waist-deep in the water, looking into each person's eyes just before he baptizes, searching for some glimmer of divinity, and then, when they come up out of the water, looking toward heaven to see if this will be the one on whom the Spirit descends and remains?”<sup>2</sup>

When John finds Jesus he can hardly contain himself. “He struggles to get it out of the water, gasping and shouting, “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/10081/have-you-found-it>

of the world!” When he tells the story later he says, “I saw it with my own eyes! I saw the Spirit descend and remain on him! I’m telling you, this is the Son of God!”

The next day two of his disciples are standing there with him, but when he sees Jesus walking by he says, “Look, the Lamb of God!” and immediately they leave John and start following Jesus. I don’t know how far they follow him before he senses their presence but eventually he turns around and asks, “What are you looking for?” And they don’t know what to say. One of them finally blurts out, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” and that’s an important word in John’s Gospel. The Greek word *meno* means “to abide, to remain, to stay.” It’s the same word Jesus uses when he talks about the vine and the branches in chapter 15: “Whoever abides in me will bear much fruit,” he says. These disciples say, “Rabbi, where are you abiding?” And that’s a clue, isn’t it? I think these two have found what they are looking for, and they don’t want to lose it. “Where can we find you next time we come looking for you?” And Jesus said, “Come and see.” And they did. They abided with him...for the rest of that day. “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon,” John notes, which is just the kind of thing you might say if you had an experience you wanted to remember the rest of your life.”<sup>3</sup>

Jim Somerville mentions “What we don’t often talk about in this story is the fact that two of John’s disciples left him to follow Jesus. He writes Last week I asked another pastor in my town how it would be if he were talking to two of his members one day when I walked by. “What if you said, ‘Look, there goes Jim Somerville, Pastor of Richmond’s First Baptist Church,’ and they left you and started following me? How would that make you feel?” “Not so good,” he said. Jim continues And let’s be honest about it: that kind of thing happens to pastors all the time. I’ll bump into somebody at a restaurant and say, “Hey, I haven’t seen you in a while!” And they’ll look a little embarrassed and say, “Yeah, well...we’ve been going to that new megachurch in town. Our kids have a lot of friends who go there, and you know how it is with kids.” I just stand there, not knowing what to say. This is why John the Baptist made it into the Bible and not me; because when people leave him for Jesus he seems thrilled.

But maybe it’s because John knew from the beginning that what he was offering wasn’t the real thing. “I baptize you with water,” he said, “but the one who comes

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<sup>3</sup> IBID

after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Do you remember that story from Acts, chapter 19, when Paul found some believers in Ephesus? He asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you were baptized?” “No,” they said. “We didn’t even know there was a Holy Spirit.” So he asked, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” And so they were baptized in the name of Jesus, and after Paul had laid his hands on them the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and prophesy (Acts 19:1-7). I think those believers would say they found what they were looking for. And to be fair to those people who visit the new megachurch in town, they may simply be looking for something they haven’t found. And maybe they will find it there.”<sup>4</sup>

Let’s talk about that for a minute. I know we are small and struggling a bit. To be honest there isn’t a mega church in town even though we might have the impression there is but I often hear complaints about how people have gone somewhere else and some of those people let me know when they are going and I have to say I always say ‘you need to go where you feel you are being fed.’ It is not about us, it is about God’s leading and I know no matter how excellent the worship or big the band or... you name your need if we are not directing people towards the holy and abundant life then we are missing the point.

Somerville explains this in his story: “when I think of megachurches I often think about the time I was a youth minister and wanted to have the biggest and best youth group in town. One of the first things I did was weigh every kid who came on Wednesday night because it sounded so much more impressive to say that we had a 1,136 pound youth group than to say we had a group of eleven kids. I did everything I could to increase attendance: we started our own radio station, held the “World’s Biggest Kite Contest,” and made regular trips to the amusement park. But I remember the day it changed for me, when I called to invite one of our youth to something we were doing and he said no thanks: that he and his friend were planning to go to a movie. And that’s when it hit me that I could never compete: that these kids had all the entertainment they needed and a whole lot more, and the only thing I could give them that they weren’t getting everywhere else...was Jesus.

So, I made up my mind to do that—to give them Jesus—and to keep it up even if the youth group withered away to less than a thousand pounds.”<sup>5</sup>

That is exactly what I was trying to say on Epiphany Sunday. In this season of Epiphany we need to be all about revealing Jesus. Still, it’s one thing to acknowledge Jesus’ glory, Jesus’ identity in the season of Epiphany. It is quite another thing to take on Epiphany in our own lives. I have had a lot of conversation lately about the state of our world and in each of those conversations we end up in a conversation about what are we going to do about it. “How much are we willing to give witness to Jesus’ epiphanous moments? Or do we sit quietly in the many justifiable backgrounds, unwilling to testify or desperately hoping someone else will? Deciding to let our role reside in observation rather than risk pointing to those places and moments when Jesus truly reveals who Jesus is? Do we have the courage to ask: Who do we need to be because of Jesus’ Epiphany?”<sup>6</sup> If we are followers of Jesus, if we truly follow we are likely to discover who and what we are looking for.

Epiphany reminds us that God needs our willingness to witness to the Truth. That is what we are here for to be witness to hope, faith, love, grace and truth. That is what I am looking for, that is what I want to do.

Karoline Lewis writes in a column to pastors “Fear of offense. Fear of losing numbers. Fear of decline. That’s what the higher ups tell you, to be worried about but really, Working Preachers, you do not have the luxury of worrying about those things. The doom and gloom disseminating from our denominational administrations, synods, dioceses, judicatories? Well, they get paid to prognosticate. They are charged with data analysis. They are deemed dependable of determining the church’s future. And as a result, we have accepted that the future of the church is spreadsheets and bell curves. But we know, and John knew and believed, a different message. You have to preach hope. You have to preach the promise of the Gospel.

The true demise of the church is not declining membership or churches closing or diminishing seminary enrollment. It’s when preachers give up on the Gospel. It’s when preachers question their epiphanous role. It’s when preachers think that their voice can never compete with the dominant voice that claims to be Christian. And, it’s when systems say that they support you, but then go on to tell you a story that undermines what you know to be true, the truth that keeps you going—that God will never, ever give up on bringing God’s Kingdom to all.”<sup>7</sup> I

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<sup>5</sup> IBID

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5406>

<sup>7</sup> IBID

don't always share with you what the authors I am reading are teaching me while I teach you but today it seemed fitting because in a time where we might be worried as a congregation and individuals about who we are and where we are going you might not all agree with me but this is what I know. We are called to live the gospel. Epiphany reminds us to not lose hope. Epiphany reminds us that our story is life changing for a world in need of change. What we do here in this place how we worship, what we offer, how we live might actually make a difference in our world if we actually live into it.

What if the future of the church was given to you/to us? What if you were called upon to articulate the activity of God? And let me tell you you indeed might be. And, what if you were called upon to live into hope, refusing to hide behind hopeless predictions. Refusing to succumb to stated inevitables because at the end of the day we trust the Spirit. Not in the institution, not in the system, not in the numbers, what if we trusted in truth, what if we trusted that God is with us and well ahead of us.

I read this next line by Lewis over and over because I thought "me too." She writes "I find myself barely able to catch my breath when the breath of God is not assumed. I find myself in want for the Spirit when the church narrates only death. I find myself in search of other truths when in fact the Truth reveals itself in this text and always." Epiphany is just that. It reveals Jesus, it reveals truth and in that revelation we come to know that even in the hardest, darkest of time there is love there is God, there is hope and grace and joy and peace and it exists more abundantly the more we believe it the more we live into it, the more we provide it for one another through changed lives, action and faith.

You may not have found what you are looking for and the truth is we will always climb mountains and search for more. Still, the truth for me is that when I seek in the midst of love, hope, peace and joy my search is a whole lot more abundant and I indeed find what I am looking for when I trust I am not alone and that the holy is way ahead of me.

Amen.