

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

In the Church of Our Lady cathedral in Copenhagen, Denmark, there is a magnificent statue of Jesus by the noted sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. One of the tales of this statue's origins was when Thorvaldsen first completed the sculpture; he gazed upon the finished product with great satisfaction. It was a sculpture of Christ with face looking upward and arms extended upward. It was a statue of a majestic, conquering Christ.

Later that night, however, after the sculptor had left his fine new work in clay to dry and harden...something unexpected occurred. Sea mist seeped into the studio in the night. The clay did not harden as quickly as anticipated. The upraised arms and head of the sculpture began to drop. The majestic

Christ with arms lifted up and head thrown back was transformed into a Christ with head bent forward and arms stretched downward as if in a pose of gentle invitation. At first, Thorvaldsen was bitterly disappointed. As he studied the transformed sculpture, however, he came to see a dimension of Christ that had not been real to him before. It was the Christ who is a gently, merciful Savior. Thorvaldsen inscribed on the base of the completed statue, "Come Unto Me". (King Duncan, Collected Sermons, www.Sermons.com)

As I read the gospel lesson for today, what leapt off the page were the words of Jesus "What are you looking for?" Just as Thorvaldsen, I had a wonderful sermon on all the names of Christ in this passage, and then talk about how Jesus changed the name of Simon to Peter. Jesus can

change your name and all of you. But as the week went on, this week, the sermon changed, the arms drooped and the head of Christ bent forward in my heart to reveal something in the gospel of John that I had not heard from Jesus in a long, long time. "What are you looking for?"

You see, it's easy to preach on John the Baptist's emphatic statement, "Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" or go the way of most preachers as they write sermons of evangelism with Andrew telling his brother Simon that he has found the Messiah. It's easy to talk about Jesus changing your life and your name because God has been with you every moment of your life and now wants to set you on a new path by His grace. These sermons are easy to write because they come from the

readily available phrases that seem to dominate this passage of scripture.

These easy sermons are kind of like the story of a woman who went to a pet store to buy a parrot to keep her company. She picked out a beautiful bird that was supposed to be the smartest type of parrot alive. This parrot was guaranteed to be easy to train to talk. She bought a book on training parrots that claimed the technique taught would have her parrot talking within a week. She took the book and her new pet home.

A week went by and she returned to the pet store and complained, "I've followed the book explicitly but that parrot you sold me hasn't said a word yet!"

The storekeeper was puzzled and asked, "Does it have a mirror? Parrots like to be able to look at themselves in the mirror. And then he'll talk" So, she bought the mirror and returned home.

Two days later, she was back, announcing that the bird still wasn't saying anything. The storekeeper thought about it for a moment and then said, "What about a ladder? Some parrots enjoy walking up and down a ladder." So, she bought a ladder and returned home.

Sure enough, two days later she was back with the same story, the parrot still wasn't talking. "Does the parrot have a swing? Birds enjoy relaxing on a swing. If he's relaxed then he'll talk." So, she bought the swing and went home.

Well, the very next day she returned to the store and announced that the bird had died.

The storekeeper was visibly upset and said, "I'm terribly sorry to hear that!" And then he asked, "Did the bird ever say ANYTHING before it died?" "Yes," said the lady. "Just as it keeled over dead, it said, 'Don't they sell any food down there?'" (Rev. Brett Blair, Traditional)

What are you looking for? You see, we can fill this place with big screens and hire a band to come and rock this place every Sunday. I can preach fiery sermons about each person having the conviction and passion their heart to tell friends and family that you have found the Messiah, you have found salvation, and they need to be saved too! We can pull out the pews, remodel the church with chairs and

beautiful hardwood floors or carpeting, make the fellowship hall a modern meeting space with audio and video, solar panels on the roof to generate our own electricity, all to get you, like the parrot, to talk to someone about Jesus and bring them here. But all of what I just said is mirrors, ladders, swings, and stuff that make us look good to the outside world, we can flash and entertain well, we could be competitive as any other church as people shop for churches to support and donate their money. But mirrors, ladders, and swings, are not what you and I are here for...the answer to Jesus' question "What are you looking for?" begins with the basics like spiritual Food. Water. Shelter.

Companionship. Aren't those the basic spiritual needs that people are looking for?

As an example, let me just take the first one...We need to be fed. As I have been on this WeightWatchers journey for the second time, I have discovered how my body feels with different foods, and one of the hallmarks of WW is writing down everything you eat. So when I look back in my food journal and see that I ate primarily carbs all day like breads, snack foods, and cereals...I felt hungry constantly. When I have a day loaded with proteins like eggs, bacon, burgers, steak, and chicken, I don't eat very much at all...but I feel awful and very sleepy. Veggies make me feel full and hang on longer than carbs, but I have to eat a ton of them, and then I feel sick. Most of you have probably thought "A good balanced diet with protein, carbs, and veggies is what he needs." And you are right! When I look in my food journal

and discovered good days where I felt great about the food I was eating, I had balanced meals.

The same idea goes with spiritual food...you need a balanced diet. If the only spiritual food you eat is praising God and singing and raising hands, that is good food...it will be like a sugar rush...but you come down hard and hungry for more. If you spiritually eat the proteins of long meditation sessions, prayer, fasting, digging into the marrow of the depths of scripture...you will be spiritually full quickly, you won't feel hungry for a long time, but very quickly, you will feel spiritually sleepy. If you eat a diet of going out into the world and feeding the hungry, working for the sojourner and the poor, this is great spiritual food, but like veggies, you have to do a ton of work in order to feel spiritually full,

and eventually you get sick and tired of it...if that's all you spiritually eat. Now granted that all imagery and allegory is faulty...I think you get the point. We need a balanced diet in our physical bodies and for our soul. Being fed is one of the answers to Jesus' question "What are you looking for?" A good spiritual diet of prayer, worship and Sacraments, study of scripture, small group accountability, and doing works of love are the five basic spiritual food groups that must be eaten every single day or at least once a week in order to be spiritually healthy.

When you eat that kind of food and fuel for your soul in the church, you now have the energy to work on the other half of being a total Christian: which is works or holiness as we get out on the track and run for Jesus. I have discovered in

my Weight Watchers experience that I need both a balanced diet and good exercise in order to be physically healthy.

Even if we eat good balanced meals everyday but do nothing but sit and wait for people to ask us about the good news of Jesus Christ, we become spiritually unhealthy.

Jesus took the initiative and asked Andrew, "What are you looking for?" then when they inquired about where Jesus was staying he said, "Come and see".

It's not enough to be fed what *we* are looking for...we must take the initiative and ask the question of others "What are you looking for?" We must invite others to "Come and see" the places and spaces in life where Jesus is especially revealed. One of those spaces and places that I'd like to highlight is homes where small groups meet to pray, listen

to one another, read scripture, and then resolve how to have a more balanced diet for their soul. Our cluster small groups is a primary place to invite people to "Come and see" what kind of food Christ offers them.

As we invite people from the community to small cluster groups...we burn spiritual calories when we answer questions like, "What difference does Jesus make in my life?" or "Why do I need a group of people in order to be a Christian? Why can't I just do this on my own?" or "What really happens when I die?" We burn spiritual calories when we become acquainted with others in Jesus' name, pray with them and cry with them, then become friends as we learn about one another, and then, most importantly, become brothers or sisters in Christ. This is the spiritual exercise or

work out that we need in order to stay spiritually healthy as a disciple of Jesus, as a congregation of Christ, and as United Methodists...and it is exemplified in Andrew coming to his brother Simon and saying, "We have found the Messiah!" and then Andrew brought Simon to Jesus...where Jesus not only changed his name but changed his life.

So I guess I will end with the same question that runs through this sermon...what are you looking for? Do you need the basics of spiritual food or drink or shelter or companionship? Are you looking for a track to work out and burn those spiritual calories that you have been saving up? What has the Holy Spirit made you hungry for today? Don't let the organ or praise music or pews or the lack of mirrors, swings, and ladders that you think should be in

church be as an obstacle to the grace that God wants to give you. Don't let the words cluster group, or accountability, or going to a home cause you to stumble in your walk with Jesus. Let Jesus feed you this week, give you water to drink, or allow Christ to call you to a ministry and a running track to stretch your spiritual muscles as you invite others to share in the basics of a healthy life in Christ. What are you looking for? Jesus wants to give you that which you need today, come to him and he will supply you with all you need. I'd like to end with one of my favorite passages from Isaiah 55: "...everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat

what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live."