

## What do you see(k)?

The sermon title asks us a question taken directly out of the Gospel passage today. Address to two of John's disciples who follow Jesus as he walks near them after hearing John's testimony to Jesus' identity. Sometimes we don't understand the nuances present in the Greek text because we read the translations. The Greeks used a great many verbs which we only find translated with one or two...the ones we see as seeing range in meaning from actual sight to understanding and knowledge which we may not appreciate without some contextual searching so I have inserted a "k" onto the word. Hopefully this will aid in our entry into the world of John's gospel. We all know that the testimony we have about the life and ministry of Jesus is found in four books which begin the portion of our Bible traditionally known as the "New Testament". We often separate it from the portion found in the Hebrew Scriptures as if God is making two different revelations to us about God's own self and being. Careful study demonstrates that God and God's purpose in relation to humanity is consistent; always revealing God's desire for relationship with us; always demonstrating God's own hessed, steadfast love and amazing grace and mercy through actions within our linear history. Within those first four books of that "New Testament", known as the gospels, those bearers of good news, there is one that is very different from the first three. The fourth gospel is often called the Maverick Gospel because it contains so many differences from the other three. These differences appear in the opening passage, known as the Prologue found in the first verses which begin much as the Hebrew text known as Genesis...in the beginning. Jesus is identified as the Word made flesh who was intimately involved with God...in fact not only was the Word with God, but the Word was God. This prologue sets the entire tone of John's gospel and illuminates the themes which this gospel account uses to identify not only Jesus but Jesus' purpose in coming to dwell among humanity. When we enter John's gospel this morning it is near the time Jesus' Galilean ministry began, just after Jesus was baptized at the Jordan. Unlike the other gospel accounts, which vary somewhat, this one is vastly different as it does NOT describe John as baptizing Jesus, but only offering testimony as to Jesus' identity. Just preceding this passage John has been questioned by authorities from Jerusalem about his own possible identity within the Jewish tradition. After emphatically denying their suggestions, he then testifies that he is only sent to witness to the one "who will come after" him. The text we have today covers the events of the next four days. The day after being questioned, John sees Jesus approaching him and takes the opportunity to declare "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'" John then describes what he saw in relation to Jesus: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." He concludes that he heard the same voice which had called him to proclaim people needed to repent because the one whose way he was to prepare was coming was the Son of God. Matthew's gospel begins by providing a genealogy placing Jesus within the context of Jewish expectations for the Messiah with some mention of events related to his birth and then his baptism by John; Luke begins by relating prophecies and angelic visits related to both John and Jesus followed with the details of how these prophecies were fulfilled leading up to Jesus coming to John for baptism and that declaration from heaven at the baptism; Mark's gospel totally ignores all this by beginning with the open statement of Jesus' identity as the Son of God as the preface to

narrating the baptism by John. It is clear from the beginning that John's focus connects Jesus of Nazareth more firmly to his divine identity. In John's gospel the baptism is described but John's only role is to testify, to witness to what he knows about who Jesus is. John's witness that he saw the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus is incarnational language as is reflected in the opening prologue: It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. Since tradition tells us Jesus and John were cousins, this section sheds some light on John's statement "I myself did not know him but the one who sent me" revealed this to me through the dove and voice which descended at the time of the baptism. The life of Jesus before his emergence at this time is largely unrecorded, but Jesus remains in the area of the Jordan and is seen again by John again the next day. John is standing with two of his disciples when Jesus walks by and takes this occasion to again identify Jesus as special, this time saying, "Look, here is the Lamb of God." This results in those two disciples who have been learning from John, to decide to follow Jesus. As they follow Jesus, Jesus turns and sees them following him so he said to them, "What are you looking for?" In our English translations the meaning of the Greek is somewhat obscured. I would be better translated as "What are you seeking?" Throughout John's gospel the various nuances of this word are used. Verbs essential to this narrative carry various concepts of physically seeing; of noticing something; of seeing in the sense of understanding; and of how seeing is related to knowing are all present within this gospel's account about Jesus' entire ministry. Specifically in this first question Jesus in asking the two "what are you looking for", he is asking them what they are seeking, what do they want to find? In many ways that is the question we are asked. When we seek to become closer to God, what is it that we are seeking; what do we hope to find? It is the greatest and most important question for our lives, because until we can define what it is we hope for, it is probable that we will not be able to discover it. When we convert the question in the passage to "What AM I looking for?, it provokes searching and seeking for as well. The themes of seeing, light, and revealing or their opposites blindness, darkness, and hiding run through every passage of John; not just this beginning interaction. With these verses we then wonder why the response of these two forms the answer to Jesus' question. They answer Jesus' question with one of their own. "They said to him, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Here this second question IS an answer, they are seeking to be closer to Jesus. This is an answer because another major theme in this found within the concept of staying, remaining, and abiding. When these disciples respond in this way, they are not trying to locate his tent or the address of the guest house at which he is visiting, they want to know about the enduring, permanent, eternal, undying dwelling place of this Lamb of God...in other words where can we find you? Where shall we go to be with you, to receive what you have to offer? Where can we be in the very presence of God? Where can we find meaning for our lives? In a culture dominated by the acquisition of things where a search for meaning can be satisfied by a search for "stuff", this is a question for which many find the answer unsatisfying. Seeking to find a place closer to Jesus often provides a better destination. In this recorded exchange, Jesus' response to their question...his answer to them is an invitation..."to come and see." In this very short passage totally 13 verses we find nine verbs about "seeing" used which give a combined weight to this aspect of the message John's gospel contains; this adds to the importance of Jesus' invitation to "come and see." This answer captures a primary message of John's gospel. If you want to know the word made flesh, come and see Jesus. If you want to know what love is like, come

and see Jesus. If you want to experience God's glory, to be filled with the bread that never perishes, to quench your thirst with living water, to be born again, to abide in love, to behold the light of the world, to experience the way, the truth, and the life, to enter into life everlasting...if you want to know God, come and see Jesus. In John's gospel, we have the testimony of that other John who knew his purpose was not about himself but about his ability to witness and testify to Jesus' identity...an important message. But even more we are shown that the Word made flesh issues invitations...not only then but always. Invitations that beckon us to come and see, to come and know, to come and understand, to come and abide with him. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.