

Rejoice! The River Is Here!
“Checking Out the Scene”
John 1:35-42

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It is the mission of the Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus said it plainly: *“Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”* By the waters of baptism we are claimed and cleansed. Along the river of discipleship we are shaped and formed into Christ-likeness. Salvation is God’s free gift to us. The best we can do is to receive it with grateful hearts. Discipleship is a life long developmental process. Are you a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ? That’s what I would like to talk about these next few weeks as we begin this fall series of sermons on the River of Discipleship.

The first spoken word of Jesus in John’s gospel is a compelling question. He turns to John and Andrew who are following Him from a distance and asks, *“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? What do you want? What are you after?”*

On the one hand the question is simple and ordinary. About once a year, usually somewhere near December 25, I go shopping. Not being a regular mall looker, I enter a woman’s clothing store rather awkwardly and begin thumbing through the first rack of clothes I find. A clerk sensing my distress comes over and asks, “What are you looking for? How may I help you?”

This is no salesperson posing the question today. As John says, *“This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”* This is the second Person of the Divine Trinity who is now dwelling among us and the Son of God is asking some would-be disciples today, *“What are you looking for? What are you after? What do you want?”*

If this same Christ were to lock eyes with you and me through the mysteries of worship and ask this question, I wonder what we would answer? What exactly do you hope to gain from being in church today, alive today, in the presence of Christ today? God has given us a beautiful day today, what do you plan to do with it? If Jesus Christ himself were to meet you face-to-face, what do you need from him? Probing questions, searching questions, a question that causes us to sort our priorities and examine our purpose for living, questions that dig down into the very core of our being and invite us to respond to the One who loves us the most. I don’t know what we might say. What words came to your mind? I don’t have time to suggest all of the kinds of things that come to my mind, but let me mention just a few of them.

My fellow Christians, why are you here? Some of us might have gotten to church today hoping that we could get a fix. Very few people who came to Jesus were looking for truth, they were wanting relief.

Renowned author Scott Peck opens his famous book The Road Less Traveled with these words. “Life is difficult.” Indeed it is. I admire parents who wrestle infants and toddlers and tug with teenagers to get them to church on Sunday. That’s why I don’t ask baptismal parents if they renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness and reject the evil powers of this world. They’ve already done that just to get their kids to church. Right now you could use a little relief, a little help.

It’s time for school to start. I don’t think school ever started in our family without tempers flaring and words spoken that would be better left unsaid. School time was crunch time. The boys were having football practice twice a day and they were tired and tense and worried about their position on the team. Sandy was always trying to assimilate kindergartners who were missing their parents and she would come home exhausted. I was trying to get in high gear for the fall and couldn’t understand why the family was not more understanding of my schedule. We would get to church this time of year saying, “Lord, have mercy.” We needed some relief, a little bit of help.

I like to think Jesus meets us at our point of need. He comes to us where we hurt. To the imprisoned, He is the key to freedom; to the sick, He is the great physician. To the trapped, He’s the door; to the hungry, He is the bread of life. To the thirsty, He is living water; to the wanderer, He is the way. To the confused, He is the truth; to the dead, He is the resurrection and the life. To anyone willing to listen, He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. O, what a relief it is to find Him as a friend. What are you looking for? What could Jesus do for you today?

Maybe we got to church searching for friendships, looking for fellowship. The early Christians were so caught up in the community that they had been able to create through the power of the Holy Spirit that they made up a word for it. You cannot find it anywhere else except in the New Testament. It was called “koinonia.” It was the fellowship of kindred minds. It was Christians coming together with the same mind and the same hope and the same dream. The Lord said to Adam, “*It is not good for you to be alone. I will make a helpmate for you.*” We were made for community. The Church is God’s best hope for “loving and being loved.” While we are certainly not perfect at it, the Church does offer community, extend compassion, and offer prayers for those in need.

It was Bonhoeffer, that great leader of the Church during the Holocaust that says, “Because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders, but as thankful recipients. When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship.”

One bright spot of Christian worship and fellowship happens here every Monday night at a ministry called the Loop. Young adults in their 20’s are now driving two to three hours to be a part of this community of faith. Here, young singles,

many new to Nashville, are finding people who care. Here, people from a wide variety of backgrounds are joining together in worship and praise to God. Sometimes we need a friend and I, for one, will do everything in my power to see that this ministry continues to thrive. It is the lifeblood of this church. What are you looking for?

What do you want? What do you need from God today? Maybe more than a fix and more than friendship, we need faith. We need to meet Him and know Him and know that He knows us. If you are Phillip Fulmer, it's all about football. If you are Jack Nicholson, it's all about movies. If you are Donald Trump, it's all about money, power, and prestige. If you are James and John, Peter and Andrew, it was all about fishing. They got up every morning and went out to the Sea of Galilee while the mist was still on the lake and the overnight winds had calmed. As the sun began to rise they would throw their nets into the water and catch enough fish to make a living. In the afternoon they would dry their nets, mend the torn places and be ready to do it again the next morning. They had a good life, if not a great life. Now they find themselves asking if there was more to life than fishing?

What demands your time? What consumes your attention? Does it satisfy your soul and bring you meaning and significance? By the world's standards you are a committed Christian if you go to church, try to do what is right and treat others nice. Lately, you've been asking, is that all there is? You don't want to study Christology; you want to meet Christ. You don't need to search for the historical Jesus; you would like to experience the risen Christ. You are not hungry for religion, but you are hungry for a relationship of a divine kind. What we long for is a life that really matters, a faith that will not shrink, a hope that will not fail, a legacy that thieves cannot steal, and an eternity that will call from us the best that is in us. That's what we are really looking for.

And so the disciples say, "*Where are you staying?*" TO THIS COMPELLING QUESTION JESUS ADDS A CONTAGIOUS INVITATION. In Verse 39 He says to them, "*Come and see.*" Come on home with me and take a look.

I call this checking out the scene. There are no preconditions to this afternoon visit with Jesus. The free lunch didn't include a sales pitch. There were no rules to subscribe to, no presuppositions to accept, no agreement to sign, no statements of faith to adhere to, no aisle to walk, no pledge to make—just a simple invitation to come over to My house and let's get acquainted. "*And they went, and saw where he was staying and spent that day with him until about 4 in the afternoon*" (Verse 39). Do you ever wonder what Jesus said to them that day? Were there long periods of silence? Were there hot debates? Could they see the love in His eyes? Did they hear His vision for the world? Did they find themselves captured by His imagination? I don't know for sure, but I know they were changed in that conversation.

What if the same Christ came to you and me and dared to say, "*Come and see.*"

Check it out; give it a chance. It could mean life to you. So for seven days I want to invite you to do three things.

1. STOP

Charles Kuralt said, “It does no harm just once in a while to acknowledge that the whole world is not in flames, that there are people in this country besides politicians, entertainers, and criminals.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve been in a hurry all of my life. My daddy implanted the “lazy” word in my brain as a kid and I’ve been trying to prove him wrong ever since. But, lying in a hospital bed last winter I realized that my father is dead and I’m not responsible for making the world go round. In fact, some things even in church go better when I keep my hands off them. Slowly I’m learning to STOP. Get some space.

If you live in a hurried step with a strained face and a driven expression thinking it’s all got to be done before night, in a now or never desperation, maybe it’s time to realize that life is not something that rushes past us and must be grasped or missed. Life is something that dwells within us, now and for eternity, and the true name of it is the peace of God through Jesus Christ. I found a new verse to live by. It is Isaiah 28:16 *“He that believes shall not make haste.”* We don’t need more time; we just need more faith in eternity.

2. LOOK

Pay attention; be aware of what’s happening around you. Since God does not send us e-mails or leave us detailed operating instructions for our lives, we need to learn to look for the clues that help us discern His will. We want the big revelations, the mighty miracles, - move the mountains, make the lame walk, feed the multitude with a poor boy’s lunch. - Do it again, God. Do it again. God is capable of shaking this mighty universe, but he most often reveals himself in the budding of a flower.

Detectives solve mysteries by paying attention. No one enters and exits a room without leaving something of themselves behind—a hair, a fingerprint, a footprint, some form of DNA. By paying close attention to the details of the case, a criminologist can identify the persons present. We too, can discover God’s hope for us by observing the details of our lives. For in Him we live and move and have our being. Open my eyes and let me see. St. Benedict used to say, “Let us open our eyes. Let us look harder and see better what God is doing among us. Absolute attention is prayer.”

3. LISTEN

Listen for the voice of God speaking. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. William Barclay would turn his hearing aids off when concentrating on his study, so he could listen for the inspiration of the Spirit. George Washington Carver would go out to the woods at 4 a.m. every morning and listen for God’s still small voice. When he started feeling small enough in God’s great creation, then he

would return to his laboratory and work on peanuts. Listen, God is speaking. Can you hear Him? The Spirit never screams. He doesn't knock down doors. He comes as a very polite guest.

*O Let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self will,
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control,
O speak and make me listen, thou guardian of my soul.*

STOP, LOOK, LISTEN. Will you do those three things for seven days?

Amen.

