

I remember distinctly a moment in my life when I was sitting in church, much like you are today, listening to the lectionary being read. I remember saying to myself, at the end of what must have been the gospel reading, "I understood every single word that was just read but I know I must've missed something because I'm not sure I get it." I felt like I was missing something; that there was something about that text that I didn't know enough about. You know the awareness you have when you don't get a joke? There is something about the situation described in the joke that you're not familiar with and the punchline just falls flat. In church that day, I realized that there was something about the situation that the text was alluding to that wasn't familiar to me. Rather than dismissing that feeling I decided at that moment that I wanted to know more. I was drawn in.

It's true that each scripture reading is full of meaning all by itself. But when you put one reading together with other readings that surround it, the meaning of those connected readings is deeper. Once I began to take on the challenge of learning more, I realized that what I didn't know that day in church was the context surrounding those words. What I didn't know was the depth and subtleties of the original language those words came from. And there's something else! What I didn't know in that moment was that in posing those questions about meaning and seeking answers to them, I would be beginning a profoundly rewarding part of my life's journey. You see, I discovered that digging into scripture is like falling into a well filled with refreshingly pleasant water; and then finding out how to swim deeper into it.

I wonder how many of you have seen *The Matrix*, the original movie of a trilogy from the nineties. In that first movie, the main character named Neo is searching for something but he is not quite sure what that something is. He comes to a pivotal point in his search when he is offered the opportunity to deepen his understanding of what he is after and to perceive his whole world in a whole new way. When he accepts this offer, a new world, a completely new understanding of human life begins to unfold. And the irony is that the something that he was

searching for was actually searching for him. That quest that Neo found himself on is the kind of quest many of us find ourselves on. It's the quest of finding real meaning and a satisfaction of purpose in our lives.

The directors of that film were able to portray what it is like to be transformed; to give yourself over completely to something that is greater than yourself. It is a portrayal that is eerily like the experience of being transformed into Christ. By using a cleverly written script and film techniques, the film's directors portrayed on film the process of letting go of worldly pursuits and worldly desires while still remaining in the world. When a person has been transformed that person sees the world through a different lens and is able to view it with a sense of detachment while remaining engaged.

The writer of John's gospel did not have the medium of film available to him. Instead, the writer of John's gospel used words put together in a clever and brilliant way to produce the same effect. The reader of John's gospel is drawn into the holy mystery of Christ in a way that is distinct from the other three gospels.

John's gospel employs a skillful use of the Greek language to point us to a new understanding of Jesus. I had a brilliant professor of New Testament named Frances Gench. She always had us look at the first words Jesus spoke in each of the gospels. She believes those words are a significant clue to the writer's focus; a clue to their specific understanding of Jesus's ministry. The first words spoken by Jesus in Mark are "The time has come at last. The kingdom of God has arrived" (Mark 1:14-15). Mark was announcing the in-breaking of God's kingdom among us. Jesus's first words in Matthew were spoken in response to John the Baptist's wonderment at baptizing Jesus when he thought Jesus should be baptizing him. Jesus said, "It is right for us to meet all the Law's demands - let it be so now." Matthew placed an emphasis on the Law of Moses. (Matthew 3:14-15) In Luke, Jesus' first words were to his parents who, after looking all over for him found him talking with the elders in the temple. Jesus

said to Mary and Joseph, “But why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” (Luke 2:49)

Listen to the first words Jesus spoke in John's gospel. They are the words you heard in this morning's reading. The first words, spoken by an adult Jesus, are similar to the words spoken in Luke. He says to one of the followers of John the Baptist who came near to him, “What are you looking for?” (John 1:38) But these are two kinds of looking, aren't they? On the surface they seem to be the same. When you look for something you have in mind what that something you are looking for looks like. In other words, You look for your glasses, or you look for your keys, or you look for your child who is on the stage in a play. In those instances, you expect to see a familiar item or a familiar face, like when Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple.

But in John's gospel the Greek language gives us a nuance that give the act of seeing a deeper meaning. A better translation of the original text is, “What are you seeking?” And indeed, seeking provides a depth of meaning that the word looking doesn't quite capture. Webster's dictionary defines seek to mean to go in search of, to try to discover; to try to acquire or gain. In my experience, one seeks a secret treasure, or a path in the forest, or an adventure. In other words, one is not entirely familiar with the goal of the seeking.

So Jesus asks John the Baptist's disciples, “What are you seeking?” And they really don't give Jesus an answer. The reader or hearer may surmise that the disciples really don't know the answer. In fact, instead of an answer, the disciples return a question, this time calling Jesus Rabbi, meaning teacher. They say, “Where are you staying?” And again, the Greek language gives us a nuance that gives us a deeper understanding their query. The word that is translated as “staying” is actually better translated as abide. It comes from the Greek word *meno*, which means abide, remain, endure, dwell - in the sense of permanence or stability.

So the plot has thickened. Jesus isn't casually, or cattily, saying to the disciple, "Whatcha lookin' for?" And the disciples aren't casually wondering, "Hey Jesus, Rabbi, where's your room at the hotel?" No. John's gospel is telling us that what John the Baptist is pointing to as the Lamb of God is someone distinctly special. Someone who meets all the requirements from Hebrew tradition of being the longed for Messiah, the one who has come to reconcile God's people to God. They long for this Messiah because they know, and we know too, that God's people have an awful habit of wandering away from God's love, of doubting that God's love is even there for us. Jesus has come to offer us a way to reconnect with the God whose love for us can never be broken.

So when we come to this place, when we come to church at St. John's, what are we seeking? We may look for a well executed liturgy, inspiring music, an enlightening sermon and the comfort of familiar prayers. We may even look for familiar faces. But what are we really seeking? I suggest that whether we know it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, we are seeking to connect with our greater and best selves that we can find through our connection with the risen Christ. We make that connection through attentive prayer and authentic participation in the many aspects of church; not just the one hour in worship but in fellowship at breakfast and suppers together, through shared study of books and the Bible and through our many and varied service opportunities. But most of all we make that connection in our shared Eucharist. Together we offer up our broken but hope filled selves for God to transform us into the body of Christ for the world.

In the gospel reading, the disciples want to know where Jesus abides; they want to know that Jesus's heart, mind and spirit abide with God. They want to know that if they follow him they can come to abide in that same place, too. There is a hymn that we sing in this church called Abide With Me. Does Jesus abide with you, in your heart, in your soul and in your mind? Follow Him more nearly and let it be so.

