

EPIP 2 2011

John 1:29-42 "What Are You Looking For?"

vs. 38: "When Jesus turned and saw them following he said to them, "What are you looking for?" That's a good question for us here today. What are you looking for when you come to church? What do you expect to find here? Why would anyone bother to take an hour or two on a Sunday morning to go to church?

Some would answer as Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "I am a regular churchgoer. I would go for various reasons, even if I did not love it. In the corner of my heart there is a plant called "Reverence", which needs to be watered once a week."

Others would come to church out of a sense of keeping in touch with God "just in case"...as the little poem goes: "Whenever I go past a church I stop and pay a visit, So when I'm finally carried in, The Lord won't say, "Who is it?"

If I were to take the mike and wander around the room asking, "Why are you here today?" "What are you looking for?" The answers probably would be different for each one here. We all come with a variety of needs. Some come out of long habit and conviction. They know that worship is essential to feed their Xian faith. Over the course of years a person who worships regularly finds that his or her life is shaped by hearing the law and the gospel and their lives are conformed to Christ. That is as it should be. But not everyone comes out of habit or conviction.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Perhaps it is to deal with some hurt in your life. Anyone who has lived more than 5 years in this world knows that the world can hurt you badly. Accidents happen, you find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, people disappoint you, a marriage breaks apart, a child strays away from the values you hold dear, a loved one is close to death or dies. Over the years I have learned as a pastor to expect that when a new person shows up in church there is usually something under the seemingly tranquil surface of that person's life that is troubling them. They are well dressed, drive a nice car. But beneath the surface what you will also find are hurts and hopes. Unemployment, loneliness, You can have it all and still not be happy. That's because there is in every human a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill.

We all have needs. Your needs are probably not so different from the needs of those sitting in front of you or behind you.

What will you find here? A number of things. 1) You will find Jesus proclaimed as Savior with clarity and conviction. 2) You will find a Biblical and theological framework to understand life. You will hear me attempt to rightly divide the law and the gospel. To call into question the values of the culture that surrounds us, to challenge you to be a follower of Jesus and to declare in as many different ways I can, the good news that your sins are forgiven in Jesus.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Perhaps it is to hear some good news. The world is full of bad news. Troubles surround us, temptations lure us, and we fail to live up to the expectations of those around us and even our own expectations. What you will find here is the most powerful medicine in the world. It is the good news of the gospel. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus. You won't hear that in the world. You won't hear it at work or read it in the newspaper. The most the world will do is try to teach you that you can overcome your shortcomings by developing a positive self-image or by working to improve your behavior. As important as that may be it doesn't deal with the reality of our lives. Deep down inside us we know what we are. We know that we have failed to be the kind of people God wants us to be. We have sinned both in our selfish acts and in our failure to act with justice and mercy. So we come to church to ask for God's forgiveness and to hear the good news. .. "Your sins are forgiven."

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Psychologists tell us that what we need most is to know that we are loved. In the news this week we have heard doctors who are treating AZ Representative Gabby Giffords say that her miraculous recovery is in large part due to her being surrounded by her loving family and friends. She knows she is loved. Newborn babies will die if they don't have nurture and affection in the early months of life. The Bible tells us of the love of God which surrounds us. The Bible also tells of Jesus our Savior who came in love to die for you that you might be forgiven and reconciled to God. You come to church to hear this over and over for these words heal the hurt in your life.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Perhaps it is to find hope. You will find hope here. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In church you hear that God is in control. This gives you hope, not because the world is getting better and better but because God is with you in the good and the bad things of life. You come to

church to have your hope restored. God wants you to live in this world with the joy of knowing that in everything God will work for good for those who love him.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Perhaps it is a place to find friends and fellowship. What you find here are Xian friends and fellowship. You come to church looking for friends who share a common faith and common values. You want a place to raise your children in the Xian faith. Illus.: A child is like a young tree. If you bend a tree when it is small it will grow up bent and deformed and will be nearly impossible to straighten out. You can't expect to bend a child to a different path after 13 or 14 years of spiritual neglect. If you are here with your young children, God bless you. You are being faithful to the command of scripture, "Train up a child in the way he should walk, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6)

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Perhaps it is a place to feel at home. What you will find here is a community in which to grow in your faith. In a church of nearly 1000 members you can't know everyone. With 2 worship services it is like having 2 different congregations. That is why we encourage small groups. In a Small group you have an opportunity to get personal. You meet and get to know other members of the congregation well. In a small group your faith can grow as you study and pray together. Small groups feed your faith and strengthen your identification with the church as the whole body of Christ. I encourage you to get into a small group. We have them forming all year long. It is a vehicle to meet new people who share your common faith and values. It will help meet your needs for intimacy that you can't get in a large group setting like worship.

WINSOME WITNESS

But there is more to being here than just getting your needs met. You also encounter Jesus who is looking for you and who is calling you to follow Him in faith and obedience. The first lesson for today says, "I will give you as a light to the nations." You are chosen, empowered and commissioned to help others find the light of Christ. So you can also look around at your friends and neighbors who have the same hurts and hopes you have and you can say to them..."Come and see". Come with me to church to meet Jesus. You can be a winsome witness to others. You have been enriched by being here. Now it is your turn to share this treasure with others.

But you say, "I don't know how to be a witness." But you should never underestimate your power for making a positive witness. When the power goes out in your home a tiny candle can prove more useful than the most brilliant star in the sky. The faucet in your kitchen sink is more useful than Niagara Falls would be. Your own witness, rightly used, is sufficient to accomplish whatever is needed. You don't need the silver tongue of an orator; but you can make the best possible use of the abilities you have. You and I don't convert anyone. The Holy Spirit does the converting, we are called on to do the inviting. Invite your friends to come and see Jesus. The Holy Spirit will do the rest.

SUMMARY

What are you looking for? If it be a place to be nurtured in faith, a place to hear the gospel preached, a place to hear that your sins are forgiven, a place to nurture your children in the faith...whatever your need, you have come to the right place, for here in this place you meet Jesus who walks with you to forgive and guide and give you life. Thanks be to God. AMEN