

“What Are You Looking For?”

Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6

John 1:35-42

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How much time do you spend looking for things?

For example: car keys, socks...the TV remote...

In MY case the answer is - - not much anymore.

I have lived in my house for 16 years.

I've been in my office here at church for 6 going on 7 years.

So I am fairly settled, and my stuff is pretty much where I know it is.

But that was not ALWAYS the case.

During our first week in our new house we spent a lot of time looking for things.

I remember looking for the toaster - - for my socks - - for a towel.

In fact, the first Sunday after Nancy and I moved into our new house I used a towel from off the top of a drawer that was in the hall. The drawer was there because it was not yet back in the chest of drawers. / The chest being easier to move empty. / And the towel was to keep dust and dirt off the stuff in the drawer. / But I didn't know where the towels were, and there was a towel. / Not clean - - but a towel.

Most people who have a home - - and have lived there for a while - - know where they keep their towel. / Think of all the things we take for granted, like that:

Your doctor, your dentist, your towel...

You know where they are.

You don't have to look.

Because - - you are at HOME.

Well...as I said two weeks ago in my sermon - - on the first part of this same chapter in John...

The entire history of the Old Testament - - and of the covenant - - revolves around this quest for a HOME. / The Jewish people seek it - - and they see it - - as a sign of God's mercy. / When they go from wilderness wandering to building a home in the so called "Promised Land" - - the main thing they want to build - - is the TEMPLE to house the Tabernacle. / It's why King David and then King Solomon are the GREATEST kings in Old Testament history: because they built the temple.

But before all that - - there was the TENT.

In the tent - - God's people wandered around - - God was with them.

But they wandered - - seeking - - looking for a home.

If you don't have a HOME - - in ONE place - - you spend a lot of time LOOKING for things - - or at least MORE time looking and seeking - - than you might otherwise spend.

And God's followers - - are frequently homeless - - in the Bible.

AND they spend a lot of time - - seeking.

Over these last three weeks - - my sermons have tried to unpack the first chapter of John. / John's Gospel has this movement of God - - moving from DOWN into our reality - - REMAINING here - - and then going back UP - - Jesus ascending to God in GLORY.

And John begins this movement - - in chapter one - - with a question from Jesus: "What are you LOOKING FOR?" / He asks the first followers this question.

And they answer: "RABBI" - - - teacher.

This question was important to John. It's exactly what happens again at the END of the Gospel of John. / When Jesus encounters Mary at his TOMB after the resurrection he asks: "What are you looking for?"

And WHAT does SHE say?

She says, "RABBI" - teacher - - the VERY thing these first disciples said.

Could this be why God - - comes DOWN into our reality?

To help us - - FIND - - what we are LOOKING for?

I think the SEEKING that we do IS connected to this DOWN and UP movement in John's gospel...

SO - - I hope we have seen that the basic movement is: first down - - and then up.

"Down and Up" is a summary of John's theology.

God creates - - and then GOD pitches a tent - - in the midst of creation.

God comes DOWN.

The then God REMAINS with us.

God DWELLS with us.

And THEN - - we are raised UP - - and GLORIFIED - - with Jesus.

God comes down here in Jesus - - and then - - Jesus goes back up there.

The first chapter of JOHN ENDS - - with these two verses:

In verses 50-51 Jesus says,

"you will see greater things than these; you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending..."

AFTER God came DOWN - - in Jesus and then REMAINED for a while - -

The final movement in the TRIO - - is back UP!

It's DIFFERENT from the basic movement of all the other THREE gospels.

Matthew, Mark and Luke - - all - - basically move in one straight line - - forward.

The other gospels are the story of Jesus movement FROM baptism - - TO the cross. / They move Jesus along through human history - - going forward.

But John is more concerned about movement UP - - than movement forward.

God came DOWN into our reality and pitched a tent - - SO THAT - -

- - eventually - - we might be raised up - - and glorified.

It might not seem like it - - yet.

But Jesus is raised - - and glorified.

And in Jesus - - God is glorified.

In chapter 13 of John's gospel it says: (13:31)

“The Son of man is GLORIFIED, and in him God is glorified”

Ours' is to believe that amazing END - - to this movement of God.

Believe! Says John - - over and over.

For John - - believing - - leads to GLORY.

WHICH is NOT what the early followers thought.

It's interesting that in BOTH the Old and New Testaments - - followers seem to NOT know - - what they are looking for. / Or at least they are looking for something - - a little DIFFERENT - - from what they eventually FIND - - or a little different from what God gives them.

In the OT early followers were seeking a homeland.

AND later they were seeking a Messiah - - who would save them from foreign powers - - invading Israel.

But what the early Jewish followers of Jesus FOUND - - was something else.

Jesus - - the Lamb - - was not exactly a victorious Messiah.

Or at least not in the way they had first thought.

The prophet Isaiah had clues to the idea that the FAITH QUEST might lead to a surprising end - - in that there was this image of a SERVANT - - who SUFFERED.

And Isaiah even says in chapter 49 that in this suffering servant Israel will be GLORIFIED. / But that was such a STRANGE idea at the time - - that most Jews had no idea what to make of it. / WHO was this suffering servant - - for whom we maybe ought to be looking - - they wondered? /

So they were looking and seeking - - but didn't exactly know what for.

The very SAME thing happens to Jesus early followers in the gospel of John.

They are looking for a RABBI...as we saw.

Or maybe for a LAMB...

Maybe even - - in JESUS - - they have FINALLY found the suffering servant Isaiah talked about!?

But NONE of them seem to be able to BELIEVE - - that this Jesus - - who will suffer - - will ALSO be GLORIFIED - - in suffering.

They are looking for someone to be WITH THEM in their suffering and seeking.

They UNDERSTAND the downward movement of God in Jesus.

But the final UPWARD FINALE!?!

Jesus begs them to BELIVE it.

“Don't hold on to me Mary.”, Jesus says:

You will see greater things than you can imagine.

Can you imagine if your life were just a continual SEARCH - - with no resolution? / Looking for something - - but not finding it?

The early followers seem to have had something of that experience.

I read about something similar recently in National Geographic.

It's an article on the "Science of Annoyance". / According to the article - - our culture is getting increasingly annoying, and people are getting increasingly frustrated with life. / From Robo calls - - and Selfie sticks - - to leaf blowers and telemarketers...

And the article says that the defining characteristics of an ANNOYANCE are that they are UNPREDICTABLE - - and they go on for an UNCERTAIN amount of time.

For example, a flight that is delayed for an hour is a bother - - but a flight that is delayed and delayed - - with no explanation - - and no end in sight - - is EXCRUCIATING!

So if we apply this to the SEEKING in the Bible reading for today - - seeking and being frustrated - - we can take. / But seeking and being frustrated - - over and over - - indefinitely - - with NO progress bar - - like on a computer - - that is too much.

But Jesus begs us to BELIEVE.

"Don't hold on to me Mary.", Jesus says:

You will see greater things than you can imagine.

So - - what are WE looking for?

Do YOU spend ANY time - - looking for God?

Looking for answers to life's SPIRITUAL questions?

OR - - are you so settled - - with everything in place - - that you can't imagine SEEKING anymore?

Hear Jesus words: “What are you looking for?” AND...

“You will see greater things than these”

May we all open ourselves - - to what God might show us.

And when we find an answer that is different from what we expected...

May we follow John’s lead - - and BELIEVE.

Does anyone remember the old movie: “The African Queen”?

It starred Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn a CHARLIE and ROSE.

Charlie and Rose are LOST in the African Jungle - - on a mission to try to reach open water. / Through the movie they go through all kinds of troubles and trials - - annoyances - - the boat gets stuck - - there are insects - - and the most VIVID are the LEECHES that stick to Charlie’s skin.

Near the end of the movie - - they think all is lost.

And they think they will be stuck in the jungle forever.

They fall asleep exhausted on the deck of the boat - - and the camera pans back - - and we see that they are just a mile or so from open water.

What does it mean to “BELIEVE” as is says in John’s gospel?

Partly - - it means to remember to live in hope.

When the waiting seems to go in forever: believe.

When the anxiety of being lost, seeking, looking - - seems like too much: believe.

When you wonder if it’s all worth it: believe.

And remember the final movement of John’s theology...

Not JUST DOWN - - - but down and then - - UP.