

January 19, 2020
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John 1:35-42 Beyond Survival: Meaningful Existence
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 1:35-42

New Revised Standard Version

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Jesus said to them, "Come and see." The Purpose Driven Life was a popular book by Rick Warren in the early 2000s. I led a study at the church I was at and 93 year old Dot Shaw came. We went around the circle talking about why we were there and what we hoped to learn and Dot Shaw said, "I want to figure out why I'm here and what God wants me to do next." Have you ever wondered why you're here? What your purpose is? Jesus said to the disciples, "Come and see... and they remained with him that day."

I went to a workshop Thursday evening and we were asked to write down our mission statement, our purpose, our what, but we could only use seven words. What would your seven words be? I said that my purpose is to love people in joy. What is your purpose? In the church we talk about a calling. What do you feel called to? Who do you feel called to?

Bishop T.D. Jakes says, "If you can't figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose." This weekend as we remember the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., I invite us to think about meaningful existence. We have been talking about what we need to thrive in 2020. To live we need food, drink, shelter, sleep and oxygen, but beyond survival we need control, belonging, meaningful existence, and self-esteem.

Meaningful existence. We all want our life to mean something. I have always wondered about the disciples, how could they leave everything behind to follow Jesus? Leave their livelihood, their homes, their families, everything that was familiar to them to follow Jesus? "Come and see... and they remained with him that day." Jesus was with them in the struggle as they wrestled with those questions, "Why are you here? What are you looking for? What are you seeking?"

Henri Nouwen says we are not called to save the world, solve all problems, and help all people. But we each have our own unique call, in our families, in our work, and in our world. We have to keep asking God to help us see clearly what our call is and to give us strength to live out that call with trust.¹

In the scripture we read, John the Baptist points Jesus out and two of John's followers start tailing Jesus. Jesus stops, turns, and asks them what they are looking for. They ask where he's staying which seems like an odd question. The Greek word translated as stay is meno. Meno doesn't mean to physically stay. They aren't asking Jesus what hotel he is at. Meno means to abide, to remain. It is referring to nature or identity. Jesus asks, "What are you looking for?" and they say "Home. Is that you?" and Jesus says, "Come and see."

A few years ago I attended a conference called Why Christian. Different writers and speakers shared about why they love Jesus and why they are still a Christian. Writer Rachel Held Evans said, "I'm a Christian because the story of Jesus is still the story I'm willing to risk being

¹ <https://henrinouwen.org/meditation/our-unique-call/>

wrong about.” At that Why Christian conference, Minister Onleilove (Onlylove) shared her story of being a community organizer. I have never forgotten her words. She said, “I am a Christian because God can bring together the daughter of a slave and the son of a slave master to work together for justice in New York City.” That’s why I follow Jesus. That’s home and hope.

Recently I read that the largest growing sector in the US are the nones. They don’t mean people in black habits but rather, when asked their religious affiliation, they said, “none.” Not Catholic or Protestant, or Jewish or Muslim, but none. These are people without a church home.

Many of us are here this morning because we are looking for our home in Jesus. We are looking for the community of people where we can inhale God’s grace and remember whose we are. I am here because I am seeking my home in Jesus and I’ve heard him say come and see. But, it isn’t as easy as it sounds. When those early disciples responded to Jesus’ invitation they soon found out that seeking to be home in Jesus by doing what he did and trying to love the way he loved also made their lives much more complicated and often uncomfortable.

When they followed Jesus they were confronted with their own bigotry, and loving like Jesus loved challenged them, just as it challenges us. The good news of God is comforting but it also makes us uncomfortable. Jesus reached out to all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances and said to them, “Come and see”. We believe that by doing as Jesus did and loving the way Jesus loved, we will be made whole and find home, purpose, and meaningful existence.

We all want to feel good in this place. We want to rest in the truth that we are deeply loved and claimed but the gospel also calls me to account for the judgments that I make, for the way that I live, for how I use my resources, for the words that I speak to other people, for the times I have been silent when I should not have been, as well as the times I have used my voice when I should have been quiet. Jesus challenges me to change, to do better, to be better, to love bigger, and deeper. That challenge will never stop.

Working for mercy, love and justice for all people is exhausting! If you don’t feel exhausted, you may have gotten too comfortable. I love the tv show Blackish. A few years ago there was an episode that lifted up Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s legacy. The high school son, Junior, had been asked to give Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech at a school rally.

Junior’s grandfather realized that Junior only knew the dream part, the part that comforts us. Junior had never heard what Martin Luther King Jr. said before that part where he challenged racial injustice and made people feel uncomfortable. Dr. King said, “We have come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off... Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. . . . Now is the time to make racial justice a reality for all God’s children. . . . The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge.”

Junior only knew the dream and when Junior heard the entire speech he was angry and felt like his teachers and textbooks had deceived him, like a huge part of his own experience had been purposefully left out. Junior picks up a baseball bat to express his anger with more than just words. His grandfather tells him no. He says now you know the why of the dream. Now you know why it was so important for Dr. King to preach the dream alongside the challenge. The dream was the why behind it all. That dream reminded them of what home was and who home was.

Making our home in Jesus sets us free and also claims our lives. It takes our breath away but it also gives us life. We want to know how we can be useful, how we can make a difference. If we want a meaningful existence, we have to bring our question to Jesus. If we don’t do enough

to spread our God-given wealth of resources with others or we don't do peace and justice work well enough, we have to bring our question to Jesus. His answer to us is to come and see. Come with Jesus and see Jesus with the poor, with the marginalized and the hated, with the imprisoned and the tax collectors, with the sick, the naked, and the hungry. Come and see how God is already at work and how you can partner with God, the creator of heaven and earth.

Come and see. It sounds so wonderful and exciting, but it may lead us to where we would rather not go. Like Martin Luther King Jr. we might find ourselves speaking out against economic injustice. Like the disciples we may find ourselves preaching a reversal of power, that there is neither slave nor free person, neither Jew nor Greek, but all are children of God and God alone is our ruler. We might find ourselves working against human trafficking, against gun violence, standing for human rights and refusing to participate in systems of oppression. We might find ourselves mentoring youth at risk and raising a family that respects and honors all of God's people. Whether we know what to do or wonder whether we are doing enough, let us live out those questions and bring them to Jesus. Jesus' invitation still stands, come and see. Amen.