

When Jesus saw that two of John's disciples were now following him, he turned, and said to them, "what are you looking for?"

These are Jesus' first words in John's Gospel, so you know they're significant.

Jesus is asking these first two disciples what they're looking for, what are they seeking, what do they *want*. If they're going to follow him, if they're to learn from him, they must begin with this question in mind, because what they're looking for, what they're hoping for will influence what they'll find, what they'll learn.

Learning from a rabbi, a teacher, in the first century, wasn't like how we all conventionally learn. They didn't show up for class once a week, for an hour long lesson, or something like that, and otherwise go about life as normal. Discipleship was an immersive experience. Disciples would enter into relationship with their teacher, would live the life their teacher lived. Disciples weren't looking for the kind of knowledge you get from book-learning, they were looking for wisdom, an embodied shared knowledge, a living knowledge, only gained through the sharing of life, spending some time journeying through life together, as companions on the way. They would have prayed together and eaten together. This togetherness, this 'living-with' in order to learn from, kept the teaching conversation going. Disciples learned through and from all aspects of their teacher's life, not just what the teacher 'knew.'

The disciples' response, "Where are you staying?" was a way for them to say to Jesus, we'd like to join you, follow you, so we might learn from you.

"Come and see" Jesus says, which they do.

How would we answer Jesus' question? What are we looking for? We've chosen to follow Jesus, too, what do we tell ourselves about why?

Unlike these first disciples, my own learning experiences have been far from immersive. Didactic learning has been the standard: a credentialed teacher has told me what I need to know, and, over time, I accumulate the knowledge I've been given, my mind becomes something of an internal library, or reference system. Each new bit of knowledge like another book up on the shelf, more stuff that I 'know.' Learning has also, for the most part, been task or subject specific, and geared for a purpose – and that purpose, ultimately, in this society, is to get a job; and then, if I'm able to get a job, then I can be a full participant, I can earn money, pay bills, and buy stuff ... and I can repeat that, for the rest of my life. This is, essentially, is what my learning has been for, it's been the purpose of my education; if I think about the question "what are you looking for?" my answer, in this cultural context, would likely reference what kind of work I might do, or how much money I might want or need, ways to be comfortable, ways to hold a position or be useful in society.

And the-world-as-it-is is quite happy with our learning directing us to this purpose, because it needs *us* for it to be the way it is. It would be quite risky to have us all actively thinking about, really, what we're looking for, because we might just answer ... not this.

Given the chance to think creatively and expansively, surely, we'd be highly unlikely to say, oh we're looking for a life that has economic growth as our primary reason for being;

we're looking for a way of being in community that accepts violence is necessary to maintain order, and so are large armies, and militarized police and vast prison systems. I think we'd be hard pressed to find anyone who says their deep longing is for maximum efficiency and productivity.

Surely none of these things are what we're truly looking for. And yet this is how we live.

Encouraged to *really* answer the question, perhaps we might say we're looking for a gentler, more just way to live together. We might be yearning for an end to violences of all kinds, and an end to hate.

Perhaps we might be looking for a life together that has relationship as primary, relationship as our very reason for being. As people of faith we might say we're looking for God, yearning for fullness of being, to be healed, restored – we might say we're looking for *life*.

We have a recent college grad in our house. Having spent well over a decade learning all kinds of stuff in school, he's now beginning the next part of his life, and there are some questions he gets asked a lot. How are you going to cover your rent? Do you have a job lined up, what kind of work are you looking for? What are your career plans? What's next? These are the questions we expect to be asked, and our lives in the world do become the answer.

But the spiritual life is born out of an entirely different set of questions: What do you think is the purpose of your life? How might you live your life fully? What kind of a world do you want to live in? How might you play a role in the transformation of the world? How might you make God's presence real through your life in the world?

What unique gifts do you have and how might you live into them? What are you looking for?

The lives we live will be the answer to a bunch of questions, so it really does matter what those questions are.

It matters why we want to follow Jesus, what we expect he'll teach us, what we'll be receptive to learning from him.

These are tough questions to answer easily, but they're important questions for us to wrestle with.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

So what are we looking for? What are you looking for?

We're right to grieve the state of the world, our righteous anger is an absolutely appropriate response to the injustice and the killing – and it's easy just to lament and bemoan the state of the world, to look on and watch, disgruntled, appalled, detached, from a distance, to not know, really, how to respond. "Come and see" Jesus says, come and see how it should be/could be, learn from me, I will give you all you need to participate in the glorious transformation of this world .. come and see, come and learn, learn what it is to *live*.

We have chosen to follow Jesus, chosen Jesus as our teacher, and we've chosen to learn from him just as those first disciples did – by living together, learning together, with him, from him.

Church is a way for us to become disciples, to immerse ourselves in the spiritual life, 'doing' life together, patiently, slowly, over time - attentively, appreciatively, listening to one another as we learn, experiencing life together, and asking and re-asking the big questions along the way. We immerse ourselves in this learning by praying together, sharing meals together, trusting one another, and making relationship the most important thing.

More than any book could ever offer, more than any class could ever teach, discipleship is a way of living. It's a chosen, intentional life of transformational learning in and through relationship, it's a chosen spiritual life of shared experience, centered on our teacher, centered on Jesus. This chosen, intentional life of learning is conversion of life and this, I know, is what I'm looking for. Who's with me?