

**Message: “What Do You Want?”<sup>1</sup>**

**“What do you want?”** What a marvelous question. For those of you who have been coaches or who have had a coach, you know this is a great, open-ended question. It’s a sign of curiosity, an open attitude. The one asking wants to know more about the one being asked. And there’s a humility to it, after all, the one being asked may respond as they choose. It’s a great way to learn from each other. It’s a great way to build a relationship.

**What do you want?** This is the question Jesus asked those who came to him, seeking to learn more. This lies at the heart of our scripture for today from the first chapter of John. Let’s explore it a bit further so we get a better appreciation for what Jesus is asking.

**Those who were sent to interview John the Baptist had a difficult task.** He was a religious leader outside the norm. John appeared in the wilderness with a message about God’s judgment and restoration. His message wasn’t mainstream, but it also wasn’t unique. At the time, there were several popular movements and much speculation about the Coming One. It was just as confusing then as it is today. Even the hope for a coming messiah wasn’t a simple idea, but a complex variety of expectations developing over centuries.

**What we see are people who believe they can pass judgment based on their understanding of Scripture.** They come to John as those who know God’s ways, with a list by which to evaluate him. But when John the Baptist quotes Scripture to identify himself, they ignore it entirely. Despite their desire to be loyal to God, they lack an openness to God.

**This lack of genuine openness is matched by a lack of personal desire.** They aren’t interested enough to come for themselves. They’re only there to have an answer for others. Even when they ask what seems to be an open question, they do so with a closed mind.

**They’re indifferent.** People with such an attitude aren’t ready to receive spiritual instruction. In effect, they’re practicing spiritual voyeurism or seeking spiritual entertainment. John the Baptist and Jesus spend little

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<sup>1</sup> Some material drawn from BibleGateway.com, InterVarsity Press commentary

time with them. But while such people aren't ready at one moment, doesn't mean they aren't ready at another time.

**It's said you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink.** True enough, but you can feed them salt. Much of Jesus' teaching is a matter of giving salt, seeking to arouse a thirst deep enough to enable a person to come and drink.

**Jesus offered this "salty" teaching through parables.** Almost none of Jesus' teaching could be understood at the time, yet there was always a hint. In fact, each parable has a profound answer for those who can understand. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls each of us to be salt, arousing interest in others so they want to know more about him.

**The Baptist's reference to the "voice of one preparing the way" is such a saying.** It's a significant expression of who he is, what he's doing and why he's doing it. His identity is his task, and this task is directed entirely toward the Lord's coming. John's humble reply should arouse curiosity. Unfortunately, it goes right over their heads. It's outside their expectations. They don't have the inner openness to hear it.

**This brief encounter raises questions for us.** First, do we have the inner openness and desire to receive God's revelation? Second, since our identity is most truly seen in relation to Christ, how does our life - our relationships and responsibilities - flow from our relation to God? It's important to think about who you are.

**John is very clear about Jesus' identity.** We see his humility when he recognizes his ignorance and, in his waiting and watching for the Coming One. Such humility is part of being receptive and obedient to God. One with such a heart can hear God. John the Baptist and John the Apostle introduce us to four truths about Jesus. Jesus is preexistent. Jesus is the Lamb of God. Jesus is filled and blessed by the Spirit. Finally, and most important, Jesus is the Son of God. These are all great topics each on another day.

**And all of this serves as the prelude for the Coming One, Jesus.**

The time has come for the Son to take center stage. Our passage gives us a distinct picture of Jesus and a description of the first disciples' initial experiences, providing further reflections on the nature of discipleship.

**John doesn't tell us anything about Jesus' initial call to his disciples.**

There's nothing but John's words: "*Look, the Lamb of God!*" (v36). There isn't even any indication the Baptist said this for the benefit of the disciples. He could have been talking to himself. The idea to follow Jesus was theirs. They heard and followed. Rather than calling them to follow him, Jesus turns around and sees them after they're already following him. He's going ahead and they're trying to catch up.

**Jesus' question to them is interesting, "What do you want?"**

It reveals their attitude toward Jesus and their reason for following him. It allows them to set the agenda. For example, they could have asked him why John called him the Lamb of God. Instead they express a desire to be with Jesus, asking, "*Rabbi, where are you staying?*" (v38). They use a term of respect, which indicates they regard Jesus with honor.

**The disciples' question, "Where are you staying?", passes the initiative back to Jesus.** His response, "*Come ... and see*" (v39), shifts the initiative right back to the disciples again as he reveals nothing and promises nothing, except they'll see where he is staying. It offers no information, but it invites relationship, if they so choose. They act like true disciples, and Jesus encourages them. They respond positively and end up spending time with him.

**There's a key point I don't want us to miss in John's Gospel: Jesus comes on the scene as one silently walking past on his way.** Instead of a voice from heaven there is only the human voice of John the Baptist. There is no reference to Jesus' temptation, no preaching of the kingdom of God, no teaching in synagogues, healing or call for disciples. Here Jesus says almost nothing. Jesus appears hidden and aloof. The first disciples take initiative. They're willing to learn more about this silent one. Most important, they aren't put off by his silence, nor do they seek to intrude on it. They're humbly receptive, seeking only to be with Jesus.

**We aren't told how Jesus began teaching such open-hearted people.**

Yet it seems like something occurred, for Andrew goes to his brother Simon and says, "*We found the Messiah!*" (v. 41). And Simon wasn't disappointed. Jesus immediately claims him by renaming him Peter. Meeting Jesus was a life-changing moment for Peter. Perhaps being in his presence is enough.

**The picture of Jesus emerging from this opening scene is different from the picture we usually have of him.** The activity surrounding Jesus we usually think of will in fact be described later. Here, John gives us a glimpse into the enormous depths of silence laying behind all Jesus does. Jesus is fully engaged, but he isn't centered in them nor controlled by them. Jesus acts in God's time and God's will, as this scene hints.

**Jesus' silence speaks powerfully of a life centered in the Spirit.**

These disciples, who will shortly be full of words, opinions and activity, desire the presence of Jesus more than answers. Their immaturity will become evident, but the crucial point of discipleship isn't whether we are mature but whether we desire to come and see, and then remain in the divine presence, the only source of eternal life and growth in grace and truth.

**So, I pose the question: What do you want?** Henri Nouwen offers this thought: "As long as we keep running around asking 'Do you love me? Do you really love me?', we give power to the voices of the world and limit ourselves because the world is filled with 'ifs.' The world says: 'Yes, I love you if you are good-looking, intelligent, and wealthy. I love you if you have a good education, a good job, and good connections. I love you if you produce much, sell much, and buy much.' There are endless 'ifs' hidden in the world's love. These 'ifs' enslave us since it's impossible to respond to all of them. The world's love is and always will be conditional. If we keep looking for our true self in the world of conditional love, we'll remain 'hooked' to the world - trying, failing, and trying again. This world fosters addictions because what it offers can't satisfy the deepest craving of our heart."<sup>2</sup>

**No one can choose for you.** Each of us, made by God in our own, unique and marvelous way, must decide our own path in life. I hope you will decide it's time to follow Jesus, putting your trust in God. Don't let others tell you what to think or do, or give into peer pressure. Let love guide your heart and soul. I look forward to walking with you on the spiritual journey of a lifetime, here, now and for all eternity. To God be the glory, amen!

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<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Henri Nouwen Society devotion*, January 12, 2023

**John 1:29-42 (CEB)**

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is really greater than me because he existed before me.’ Even I didn’t recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be made known to Israel.” John testified, “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and it rested on him. Even I didn’t recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and testified that this one is God’s Son.”

The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus walking along he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

They said, “Rabbi (which is translated *Teacher*), where are you staying?”

He replied, “Come and see.” So they went 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 disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated *Christ*). He led him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated *Peter*).