

John 1:29-42  
January 16, '11

"FIRST WORDS"

IT'S EXCITING TO HEAR A BABY'S FIRST WORDS.

OUR GRANDSON DYLAN IS ON THE THRESHOLD OF THAT MOMENT.

OUR YOUNGEST SON, DAVID, WAS WITH DYLAN LAST WEEK & HE'S PRETTY CONVINCED THAT DYLAN SAID "DAVID" WHILE HE WAS THERE.

DEREK, OF COURSE, IS CERTAIN THAT WHAT HE HEARD WAS NOT "DAVID" BUT "DADDY."

AND, NATURALLY, DYLAN'S MOM, ERIN, THINKS THEY'RE BOTH WRONG!

THE STATISTICS ARE IN HER FAVOR.

WHILE A BABY GIRL'S FIRST WORD IS LIKELY TO BE MOMMY OR DADDY OR SOME FORM OF THOSE, A BOY'S MOST-LIKELY FIRST WORD IS "BALL."

"DOG" OR "CAT" ARE ALSO LIKELY POSSIBILITIES.

EMMA SUE & I HAD A GOOD FRIEND, FATHER GERRY RENN, WHO SWORE HIS FIRST WORD WAS "VELVEETA."

WHATEVER A CHILD'S FIRST WORD IS, IT'S MEMORABLE.

I THINK THAT'S ALSO TRUE OF THE FIRST WORDS OF JESUS IN THE GOSPELS.

IN MATTHEW, IT'S THE EXCHANGE WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST THAT WE FOCUSED ON LAST WEEK.

IN MARK, IT'S HIS PROCLAMATION AFTER JOHN'S ARREST – *"THE TIME IS FULFILLED & THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR. REPENT & BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS."*

IN LUKE, IT'S HIS CONFRONTATION WITH SATAN IN THE WILDERNESS.

*"ONE DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE,"* JESUS TOLD SATAN WHEN HE WAS TEMPTED TO TURN A STONE INTO A LOAF OF BREAD TO EASE HIS HUNGER.

HERE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, THOUGH, WE HAVE SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT.

BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER, THOUGH, I MUST SAY WE'RE ON VERY FAMILIAR TERRITORY HERE.

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT THERE IS A FINE LINE BETWEEN BEING IN A GROOVE & BEING IN A RUT.

WE SEEM TO BE IN THE MIDST OF ONE OF THOSE UNINTENTIONAL SERMON SERIES THAT WE FIND SOMETIMES.

I HADN'T PLANNED IT THIS WAY, BUT SOMETIMES IT JUST SEEMS TO HAPPEN.

THE ENTIRE SERIES WOULD PROBABLY BE LABELLED *"LITTLE WORDS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE."*

THAT'S WHAT WE'VE HAD FOR SEVERAL WEEKS NOW.

TWO WEEKS IN A ROW, IT WAS "FOUR LITTLE WORDS."

*"THEY GAVE HIM GIFTS."*

AND THEN, *"FOR ALL THE PEOPLE."*

LAST WEEK, IT WAS A SINGLE WORD "US," AND THE STUNNING IMPLICATIONS OF AN UNDERSTANDING THAT JESUS NEEDS "US" TO FULFILL HIS MINISTRY ON EARTH.

TODAY, IF WE WOULD BE FOLLOWING THAT SAME THEME OF "*LITTLE WORDS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE*," WE'D BE BACK TO FOUR.

HERE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, THE FOUR LITTLE WORDS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE, ARE THE FIRST WORDS WE HEAR JESUS SPEAK IN THIS GOSPEL.

THEY ARE WORDS THAT ARE UTTERED IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION.

THEY ARE WORDS ADDRESSED TO TWO YOUNG MEN – MEN WHO WOULD EVENTUALLY BE TWO OF HIS FOLLOWERS – ANDREW AND, MORE THAN LIKELY, JOHN – THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL.

THE FOUR LITTLE WORDS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE ARE "*WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?*"

THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION RENDERS IT "*WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?*" BUT "*WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?*" IS PROBABLY MORE ACCURATE.

WHAT A QUESTION IT IS!

IS THAT NOT THE QUESTION OF THE AGES?

IS IT NOT THE QUESTION ALL OF US NEED TO ANSWER?

IT MAY WELL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION OF OUR LIVES.

"*WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?*"

"*WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?*"

"*WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF LIFE?*"

NOTICE THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE QUESTION IS ASKED.

JESUS HAD BEEN BAPTIZED BY JOHN THE DAY BEFORE.

HE'S READY TO BEGIN HIS MINISTRY.

THE WORLD STANDS BEFORE HIM.

THESE TWO YOUNG MEN, HAVING BEEN TOLD BY JOHN THAT JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD, BEGIN FOLLOWING BEHIND HIM.

JOHN TELLS US THAT "*JESUS TURNED.*"

HERE HE WAS – ABOUT TO EMBARK UPON HIS ENTIRE MINISTRY TO PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO THE WORLD & HE STOPS HIMSELF.

HE INTERRUPTS THE JOURNEY.

HE "TURNS" TO REACH OUT TO THESE TWO YOUNG MEN.

HE ASKS THEM THE ETERNAL QUESTION AROUND WHICH ALL OF LIFE REVOLVES.

"*WHAT DO YOU SEEK?*"

WHAT'S *YOUR* ANSWER?

IS IT SOMETHING AS ELUSIVE AS HAPPINESS, AS SHALLOW AS PLEASURE OR AS FLEETING AS WEALTH?

WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT OUT OF LIFE?

ISN'T THAT THE QUESTION WE ALL WANT TO HAVE ANSWERED?

WHAT JESUS ASKS MIGHT ALSO BE TRANSLATED, “*WHAT DO YOU TREASURE?*” OR “*FOR WHAT WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE?*” OR “*WHAT’S YOUR HEART’S DESIRE?*”

WHAT WOULD YOUR RESPONSE BE?

IT ISN’T EASY, THOUGH, NOT ONLY FINDING WHAT IT IS WE WANT BUT EVEN KNOWING WHAT IT IS WE’RE SEEKING!

HOW DO YOU ANSWER THAT QUESTION!?

ANDREW & JOHN DIDN’T KNOW HOW TO ANSWER IT EITHER.

LOOK AT THEIR RESPONSE.

IT’S ALMOST COMICAL.

“*WHERE ARE YOU STAYING?*”

HOW IN THE WORLD IS THAT AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, “*WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF LIFE?*”

“*WHERE ARE YOU STAYING?!?*”

AH, BUT IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE QUESTION OF JESUS MAY MEAN MORE THAN IT FIRST APPEARS, SO MIGHT THEIRS.

THE WORD THAT IS USED HERE FOR “*STAY*” MEANS MORE THAN IT FIRST APPEARS TO MEAN.

THESE TWO FUTURE DISCIPLES AREN’T REALLY ASKING JESUS FOR THE LOCATION OF HIS TENT.

THEY DON’T WANT TO KNOW THE ADDRESS OF THE GUESTHOUSE WHERE’S HE LODGING.

THEY’RE NOT ASKING WHICH HOTEL WILL BE HIS SLEEPING QUARTERS WHILE HE’S IN TOWN.

THE WORD THAT IS USED HERE FOR “*STAY*” IS A WORD THAT MEANS *ENDURE, REMAIN, CONTINUE, DWELL*.

IT’S A WORD THAT JESUS HIMSELF USES.

AFTER HE’S FED A MULTITUDE, HE CAUTIONS THE PEOPLE NOT TO WORK FOR THE BREAD THAT PERISHES, BUT FOR THE FOOD THAT “*ENDURES*” – THE FOOD THAT “*STAYS*.”

IN THE UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE, HE PROMISES THAT HE WILL “*ABIDE*” OR “*STAY*” WITH THOSE WHO “*ABIDE*” OR “*STAY*” WITH HIM.

YOU SEE, THIS IS PERHAPS WHAT THESE TWO YOUNG MEN ARE ASKING JESUS.

SO MAYBE THEIR RESPONSE TO JESUS’S QUESTION “*WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?*,” ISN’T SO RIDICULOUS AS IT SOUNDS.

THEY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE ENDURING, PERMANENT, ETERNAL, UNDYING DWELLING PLACE OF THIS “*LAMB OF GOD*” AS JOHN HAS CALLED HIM.

THE FOUR LITTLE WORDS IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION THAT JESUS ASKS ANDREW & JOHN IS FOLLOWED BY A FOUR-WORD QUESTION OF THEIR OWN – “*WHERE ARE YOU STAYING?*”

AND THE RESPONSE JESUS OFFERS IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE PREVIOUS TWO QUESTIONS.

IT’S THREE LITTLE WORDS – “*COME & SEE*.”

IT’S LIKE THE INVITATION IN THE VERY NEXT VERSE AFTER OUR PASSAGE TODAY, WHEN JESUS SAYS TO PHILIP “*FOLLOW ME*.”

*“COME & SEE WHO I AM, WHERE I DWELL & WHAT I DO.”*

THIS SAME CHALLENGE IS FOUND ELSEWHERE IN JOHN’S GOSPEL.

JUST 4 VERSES LATER, PHILIP SAYS TO NATHANIEL, “COME & SEE.”

WHEN A SAMARITAN WOMAN HAS HAD HER LIFE TRANSFORMED BY JESUS, SHE RUNS INTO TOWN & SAYS TO THE PEOPLE, “COME & SEE.”

WHEN JESUS ISSUES THIS CHALLENGE TO ANDREW & JOHN, NOTICE WHAT IT *DOESN’T* INCLUDE.

THERE’S NO ETHICAL TEACHING HERE – NO SOCIAL PREACHING, NO SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE, NO CALL FOR CONFESSION OF FAITH IN HIS NAME.

IT’S NOTHING MORE THAN “COME & SEE.”

*“COME & HANG OUT WITH ME FOR A WHILE. GET TO KNOW ME. WATCH WHAT I DO. SEE WHERE I’M STAYING – WHERE MY HEART & MY VERY SOUL ABIDES.”*

WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE IS THE RESULT OF SUCH “HANGING OUT” WITH JESUS?

I THINK IT ENABLED THOSE 2 YOUNG MEN & ANYONE ELSE WHO FOLLOWED JESUS TO SEE LIFE – TO SEE THE WORLD – TO SEE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS IN A BRAND-NEW WAY.

I THINK THAT’S STILL TRUE TODAY.

FOLLOWING JESUS – HANGING OUT WITH HIM – CREATES A VIRTUAL SEISMIC SHIFT IN THE WAY WE VIEW EVERYTHING.

IT WAS THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PHILOSOPHER BLAISE PASCAL WHO SAID, *“THERE IS A GOD-SHAPED HOLE IN THE HEART OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL WHICH CANNOT BE FILLED BY ANY CREATED THING, BUT ONLY BY GOD THE CREATOR.”*

THE WAY WE LOOK AT THE WORLD, THE WAY WE LOOK AT OUR LIVES, THE WAY WE LOOK AT OTHER PEOPLE, THE THINGS WE DEEM IMPORTANT, THE WAY WE HANDLE THE PAINFUL EVENTS OF OUR LIVES – EVERYTHING IS CHANGED WHEN WE “COME & SEE” WHO JESUS IS – WHEN WE ABIDE WITH HIM – WHEN WE DISCOVER WHAT IT IS WE’RE REALLY SEEKING IN LIFE.

I TALKED TO SOMEONE RECENTLY WHO FACES A DIFFICULT STRUGGLE.

SHE SAID SHE REALIZED THE “*WHY ME?*” QUESTION SIMPLY DOESN’T WORK WHEN FACED WITH ANYTHING IN LIFE.

AS WE TALKED, I WAS REMINDED OF DAVID BAILEY’S REFLECTION ON THAT.

HE SAID HE WENT THROUGH THE “*WHY ME?*” PHASE WHEN HE WAS FIRST DIAGNOSED WITH BRAIN CANCER.

BUT ONE DAY, AS HE WAS OUT WALKING – RAILING AGAINST GOD – HE HEARD WHAT HE WAS CERTAIN WAS GOD SPEAKING TO HIM.

AND GOD SAID, *“DAVID, YOU’RE ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION.”*

AND DAVID SAID HE REALIZED, IN THAT MOMENT, THAT THE QUESTION HE NEEDED TO BE ASKING WASN’T “*WHY ME?*,” BUT “*WHAT NOW?*”

NO MATTER WHAT STRUGGLE YOU FACE IN LIFE, THAT'S PERHAPS THE BETTER QUESTION TO BE ASKING  
– "WHAT NOW?"

AND EVEN IF YOUR LIFE IS RELATIVELY STRUGGLE-FREE, IT'S STILL A GOOD QUESTION TO ASK.

ASK IT EVERY MORNING.

ASK IT WHEN LIFE IS EASY AS WELL AS WHEN IT'S HARD.

"WHAT NOW, GOD?"

BECAUSE, IN ESSENCE, IT'S THE SAME AS ASKING YOURSELF THE QUESTION JESUS ASKED ANDREW &  
JOHN.

"WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING? WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF LIFE?"

AND THEN, REMEMBER THE RESPONSE THAT JESUS OFFERED WHEN THEY SOUGHT TO DISCOVER THE  
PLACE WHERE JESUS WAS ABIDING.

"COME & SEE."

FOLLOW JESUS.

FOLLOW HIM AS CLOSELY AS YOU CAN & SEE IF THERE ISN'T A SEISMIC SHIFT IN YOUR ENTIRE OUTLOOK  
ON LIFE.

EVERYTHING CHANGES BECAUSE YOU'RE FILLING THE GOD-SHAPED HOLE IN YOUR HEART THAT CAN  
ONLY BE FILLED BY THE ONE WHO CREATED YOU. AMEN.

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