

Epiphany Sermon Series: "Is It All About Location?"

"Looking"

Salem United Methodist Church

John 1: 35-42; Acts 3:1-10; Psalm 40: 1-11

January 19, 2014

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The church is in the season of Epiphany—the time in which we celebrate that God is made known to us in a man named Jesus. This season follows Christmas. In it we know that we need more than Christmas so we move from Jesus as a baby in the manger to Jesus as a man receiving God's blessing in his baptism launching him into ministry. Today Jesus begins to gather those he will train in the ways of God. During this time of Epiphany as we explore how God is made manifest to us in Jesus, we will ask the question, "Is It All About Location?" Is location important to our faith? Is location important as a follower of Christ?

"Location, Location, Location." This is the mantra of realtors. It is the number one rule in real estate. A home must be in the right location for the buyer to purchase. The buyer may want to be located in the right school district or be close to entertainment and shopping. The buyer may want a home with a view, a home close to outdoor recreation, jobs, family, or public transportation. If you own a home, think about why you purchased a home in the particular location that it is in. If one finds the right house in the wrong location, usually the sale doesn't happen. It is difficult if not expensive to move the right house in the wrong location to the right location. So the right location is important in the real estate market, and also if you lose something. A gentleman dropped his key and he is on his hands and knees looking for it at a lamp post. A lady stops and asks him what he's doing. He replies that he lost his key. She then asks him, "Did you lose it here?" He said, "No, I lost it down the street." She asks, "Then why are you looking for it here?" The gentleman replies, "Because the light is better here."

Yes, it pays to look in the right location. And this is where we will begin with looking. The word, "look," shows up three times in two of our scriptures today. First, John the Baptist directs us to look at Jesus, the man, as the Lamb of God. Second, Jesus asks potential disciples, "What are you looking for?" And third is in the Acts of the Apostles. John and Peter, two of Jesus' disciples are now commissioned to spread the word about the Crucified and Risen Jesus, God in human form. As they encounter a lame man they direct him to look at them. When he does he receives healing and is able to walk.

The word "look" has several different meanings. When we look at something we examine it, consider all the angles or options. When we are looking for something, we might be expecting or anticipating to find something. Or in looking we might see something we didn't see before. Or in looking we might consider something we haven't considered before or explore something that we haven't explored before. And sometimes we look and cannot see.

One of the roles of John the Baptist was to have us look and see something we haven't seen before. "Look," he says. See this man Jesus is something new. He is God's Son who is the Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb who will be sacrificed for all humans." It is with these words that others begin to look, others begin to search for something they were expecting—a Messiah, a special one from God. When they find him, Jesus asks them "What are you looking for?" It's a deep question. They don't know quite how to respond so they rely on responding with small talk. "Oh, we just wanted to know where you are staying." John has just told them that this is the Son of God and all they can respond with is the need to know Jesus' location. But what were these men looking for? They call Jesus, teacher or rabbi. Were they looking for knowledge? Where they looking for answers to life's questions? Where they looking to become freedom fighters against Roman government? Where they looking for the presence of God to be with them in life's struggles? We don't really know because they are unable to

articulate this, so they fall back on casual conversation about location. Where are you staying? Perhaps they were reserving judgment on Jesus if he was not living in a suitable place. But once they saw where Jesus was staying, I'm not sure how important the location was. There was something else that caused them to stay with Jesus all day and then bring others to meet the Messiah. They must have found what they were looking for—someone who would listen, someone who spoke words of wisdom, someone who understood them, someone who knew their hearts. We know now that they stayed with Jesus during the entire three years of his ministry. Then they witnessed arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. And later received the Holy Spirit who empowered to be go in Jesus' name to teach and preach about Jesus, and heal. So they say to the lame man, "Look at us." And with a look, they were able to heal.

So in these scriptures we have three different sentences with the word, "look." One imperative sentence: "Look, here is the Lamb of God." One interrogative sentence asking, "What are you looking for?" And another imperative sentence, "Look at us." Perhaps looking to Jesus may mean examining him from different angles or sides as we strive to understand who is his for us. And this is why Jesus' question is still relevant today. We need to know what we are looking for. Are we looking for status, power, or riches from Jesus? Are we looking for love, acceptance, respect, caring, community and/or forgiveness? What are we looking for? Is it connected to a location?

This weekend we celebrate the birthday of a religious and civic leader, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. Location was important during the days preceding civil rights. By law, the color of one's skin allowed one to either be allowed into particular locations or not. One could be arrested, tortured, and some killed for being in the wrong location. Dr. King's vision was a world where everyone could be in any location any time together. So location does matter.

This past week location mattered in W. Va. If one was located within nine W. VA counties, one couldn't drink the water because of spilled toxins. Yet if one was located just outside that area, one could use the tap water. Saint Andrew United Methodist Church in St. Albans W. VA., is located just outside the contamination area. They get their water from another source and were able to fill up jugs of safe drinking water for their neighbors just a few miles down the road. This Methodist Church stood up and cried, "Look at us." This was not to draw attention to them, but to share what they had with those in need. Their location became very important. People came to them looking for water and found it. They became the giver of water to their neighbors. They did what Jesus would do. Give water to the thirsty. Remember WWJD? What would Jesus do? That's a tough question to answer, isn't it? We think we might know what Jesus would do, but how can we really. One student asked her pastor once, "How can I know what Jesus would do? I'm not divine. I'm human." We cannot know exactly what Jesus would do in any or every situation, but we are directed to look to Jesus as he asks us the question of us, "What are you looking for?" When we look again, we might see something in Jesus we have not seen before. We may see something we didn't expect. We may see something we hadn't considered. We may find a location of love, hope, and healing. Even as we are trying to know what we are looking for, we can we say to others, "Look at me. I can help you find what you are looking for because I am looking too."

Reflection Questions: What are you looking for? And why would others want to look to you?

Resources: *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 4*, David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds.; "Jodibear58 on 365 Project:" <http://365project.org/jodibear58/odds-and-ends/2014-01-05#.Us2ehrRJo94.gmail>

