

JOHN 18:4 – WHOM DO YOU SEEK? – THE SEARCHING QUESTIONS OF LENT #2

“Whom do you seek?” – John 18:1-6

Alot of people don't know what it's like around the church during the week. Let me enlighten you. It isn't all quiet sequestered uninterrupted contemplative bliss meditating on God's Holy Word. I assure you. Just answering the phone or opening the door in this place invites adventure. “I want to rent the hall.” Next call, I'm not kidding “ I want to rent an apartment next door” Before you can draw breath to speak the supplemental question comes, Does it come with parking access?”. The door rings or rather it pounds because the bell hasn't worked for six months or so, “I'm Sam Sneed representing an environmental coalition against the XL Pipeline? Will you post this and encourage your membership to sign?

The nonsense never seems to end. There's people with retirement forms to notarize. There's someone thinking I know something more than they about computers, English, psychiatry, medicine or the filling out of governmental forms. And while all of these visits, interruptions and strange calls offer and frequently do provide a means to segway into the heart of Word and Sacrament ministry I'm mostly left wondering at the mind set of people who come and so simply want to ask “Whom do you seek?”

I don't need to read too far into the life of Christ before I discover my Lord and Master expressing some exasperation with the people around him who come with all the wrong, misinformed reasons. Some want to make him king in this world. Others just want a miracle from another world. Some pretend to want a judicious judgment. But instead of giving way to all manner of crankiness saying “I'm the Messiah not a social worker, employment agency, court judge or Jester (you fill it in)” he takes them all, deals with their perceived needs and shows them their greater ones. He takes all of their

inadequate appellatives of him and reveals to them all who he truly is. He gives them parables with signs pointing to His unique person and the Kingdom of God. Likewise, his miracles also are foremost signs showing forth the nature of His Kingdom.

But this evening, towards the end of his life, he hadn't much time left to play around. Jesus places a searching question into hearts "Whom do you seek?" What is greater is that he responds in power and in truth "I am".

Soldiers came up the Mt. of Olives in force with lanterns, torches and weapons. They had come expecting to arrest a dangerous man. Peter with his sword, himself mostly confused concerning who Jesus was would have added to the misinformation. Jesus pushes past. He will not even feign retreat: "Whom do you seek?"

"Jesus of Nazareth" they reply scarcely knowing what they've got themselves into.

The soldiers expect a tussle. Maybe some clang of metal on metal. Maybe a frantic search in the darkness or torching of the Olive grove itself flushing out the "would be strong man of Galilee".

What they get is a commanding word.

O what a refreshing response for the Christian to follow. When people come looking for all kinds of things and everything but what this structure is designed for may they increasingly get the unadulterated, uncompromising, and bold Word of God!

"Whom do you seek?" "Jesus of Nazareth".

I am *he*...

Now it's a shame that you cannot see my manuscript. I've quoted from the King James Version at this point. These translators wanted to be as literal as possible but sometimes to make it proper English

they had to add a word or two but so that everyone would know they put the additional word in italics.

I am *he*. (*He being in italics*) We are left with the Name above all names.

I am.

Do you know the power in this name? Let me quote some context for you.

¹⁴ And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. (Exodus 3:14)

When these words, accompanied by an unseen power that sent the soldiers staggering back and to the ground there was no doubt, at least for the moment concerning who it was that they encountered. They had encountered the Living God. They have encountered the one who stood with Moses against Pharaoh and His armies. They have encountered the One who stood against Pharaoh's magicians of the dark arts who could make snakes materialise from staffs and all manner of lying wonders.

But beyond the power inherent in the name was a quality without cohesion but rather magnetic pulling drawing strength – I speak of Love. Jesus was telling the truth when he said that his teaching was never in a dark corner but done in the open so that all could freely hear his great “I AM statements.

- 1) I AM the bread of Life. (John 6)
- 2) I AM the Light of the world. (John 8)
- 3) I AM the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (*John 10:9*)
- 4) I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His Life for the sheep (John 10)

- 5) I AM the resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me will live even though he dies. (John 11)
- 6) I AM the way, the truth and the life...(John 14:6)
- 7) I AM the vine you are the branches... (John 15)

In all of these statements, some more clearly spoken of than others contain the sacrificial element of his nurturing love.

But as readily as Pharoah had hardened his heart to the reality of the Almighty in their midst so also did these soldiers harden their hearts. Our Lord had to let them go their own way. But for his own disciples he protected them to the very end so that his revelation concerning his love would be seen by all. The prophecy: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." would be fulfilled.

It's interesting how if we were to study all of those "I AM" statements in greater detail how people had come to Jesus with so many different expectations. Some wanted a teacher or judge or "bread king" but Jesus always left them with more than what they asked for. How frequently do we see similar things play out in the life of the church. So many come out of so many mixed and confused motives.

May we then learn to follow our Lord then, sharing what we have received. The great I AM.

And the most important lesson of all, remembering as we come to him in all our misguided expectations of him, to walk away with the one who is "I AM" who contains all, is all, and has the power over all. May the Lord continue to work through these searching questions during this Lenten season.

Amen.