It's clear that we shouldn't be looking to John the Baptist for advice on how to grow a church.

He sends his best people away.

John's disciples—his inner circle, the ones who knew his fire and trusted his voice—are redirected to another preacher. And when they arrive, that preacher looks surprised to see them.

Jesus turns to these strangers and asks, simply,
"What are you looking for?"

It's almost awkward. As if he's saying, "Can I help you?"
But underneath it, the question is far more searching:
Why are you here? What do you want from me?

Still, Jesus doesn't interrogate them. He doesn't explain himself.
He just asks the question.

And it's a good one. Maybe THE question. Especially for those who sense that God is up to something in their lives.

For those who are looking for more than what they were handed as children.
For those who suspect the universe holds more than what the eyes can see, the ears can hear, or the hands can touch.
For those who feel a God-sized ache within them, an

emptiness that doesn't shrink with age, but grows wider with every turning year.

"What are you looking for?"

We bring that question with us into worship. Even if we don't name it. We come looking for something.

Some come looking for God—for an encounter that widens their imagination, restores their courage, and helps them leave seeing the world differently than when they arrived.

Some come looking for community—for proof that faith isn't a solitary act, that there are others walking the same road, ready to encourage and carry one another.

Some come looking for meaning in a world that often feels hollow. Hope in a weary time. Good news in a culture saturated with bad news.

And some come not knowing what they're looking for at all, only hoping they'll recognize it if it appears.

That's likely where John's disciples were. Something about John's fierce honesty had awakened them. They left their ordinary lives to follow him, even if they didn't fully understand his words. They knew his message was true, truer than anything else they'd heard.

So it must have been confusing to find themselves standing before another teacher.

If John sent them here, there must be something more to this Jesus. And what was that strange phrase John used: “the Lamb of God”?

Jesus asks his question. They answer with one of their own: “Where are you staying?”

It’s an odd reply. Why ask about lodging? What does that have to do with faith?

But Jesus doesn’t correct them. He doesn’t explain. He simply says, “Come and see.”

And just like that, his movement begins.

Something in what they saw and heard convinced them. Soon they were telling others, “We have found the Messiah.” But that word—Messiah—was loaded. It meant different things to different people.

Some expected a warrior king, someone to drive out the Romans and restore national glory.

Some hoped for a religious reformer who would revive devotion and restore purity.

Others imagined a cosmic rescuer who would destroy the world, punish the wicked, and lift the righteous into heaven.

It turns out not much has changed in two thousand years.

That's why Jesus' question is so dangerous. Because we all come looking for something—and often what we're looking for says more about us than about God.

I may be looking for God, but my motives aren't always pure.
I want God to give me a good life without much effort.
I want certainty instead of faith.
I want blessing for those I love, and consequences for those who annoy me.

And that's why God is rarely interested in giving me exactly what I'm looking for.

Throughout scripture, what people ask for is not what they receive.
They want a king; God gives them a lamb.
They want their enemies destroyed; God gives mercy.
They want their glory days back; God gives forgiveness.

Faith is difficult because God cannot be controlled.
Prayer is not a vending machine.
We don't insert our desires and receive instant results.

And yet—again and again—what God gives is deeper, more healing, more life-giving than what we ask for.

So when Jesus asks, “What are you looking for?” he’s inviting us beyond our surface desires, beyond our ego needs, into the life God is already offering.

Do you believe you’ll find that life here? Among God’s people? In Word and sacrament? In prayer and praise?

Most of us would answer both yes and no.

Yes, we do encounter God here.
We hear forgiveness spoken aloud.
We remember that we are beloved children of a living God.
We hear glimpses of a new world breaking into this one.

When we receive Holy Communion, we trust that Christ meets us in bread and wine, so we eat and drink, and are satisfied.

But there are other moments too.

Moments when God feels distant.
When faith slips through our fingers.
When questions go unanswered.
When tears are more real than comfort.
When the bread feels stale and the wine tastes sour.
When the road is dark and morning feels far away.

It’s there that John points and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Not to the confident.
Not to the certain.
But to a battered, questioning community, people still carrying the marks of life, united not by clarity but by longing.

And that's good news.

Your questions don't disqualify your faith, they deepen it.
Your scars are evidence that you've lived, and that God has carried you this far.
Your losses have taught you compassion, how to sit with others in pain without turning away.

If your faith feels unstable, it's because faith is alive.
It moves. It searches. It peers over the horizon.

For some, faith is like a cathedral—solid, luminous, anchored in place.
For others, faith is like a warm blanket—a quiet assurance of being held.

But for many, faith is a dark path and a dying flashlight—relying on a voice you can barely hear, trusting the one who has already walked ahead.

That voice still says, "Come and see."

That voice is the Lamb of God.
The Messiah we have found, and who has found us.

So again:
What are you looking for?
From life?
From God?
From yourself?

These questions don't lead you away from faith. They lead you deeper into it. They guide you toward who you truly are, not who others expect you to be, but who God created you to become.

And as you grow into that truth, you become a clearer reflection of the divine image within you.

What makes you human makes you holy.
And what makes you holy makes you fully human, beautifully limited, deeply loved, held by the eternal.

May we trust the voice that guides us step by step, carries us when we stumble, and brings us home when we fall asleep.

May this be so among us. Amen.