

Baccalaureate Service
Pepperdine University, Seaver College
Firestone Fieldhouse
April 27, 2007, 5:30pm

“What are you Looking For”
Sermon by D’Esta Love

Can it be that they have passed so quickly, these past four years? Can it be only four years ago you came to Malibu and moved into our neighborhood? You came from all over the world, crossed many time zones to get here. You came with your cars loaded –some of you even came with U haul trailers—bringing all your stuff.

And you moved right into our neighborhood. And we noticed. And you have shared your lives with us—and participated in ours. It wasn’t long before we began seeing you in our classes but also eating in the caf (and sometime you bought our lunch), or running on the track, worshipping in Stauffer Chapel and Elkins, we saw you at ballgames, even had you into our homes and once in a while at Ralph’s Market. (we will miss you) You have shared our life—have done the ordinary things that we do in this neighborhood and I think you made it your home for these past four years.

This is not unlike the way the Gospel of John describes the incarnation. Jesus—the word made flesh who was with God in the beginning and who was God took on flesh and blood—crossed a major time zone— as the Peterson translation expresses it—he moved into the

neighborhood. And we noticed. As the writer of John says, we beheld him—and what we saw was glory.

And he did the ordinary things that we do. He attended a wedding, sat by a well when he became tired and thirsty, shared a lunch on a mountainside with some of his friends (quite a lot of them actually) wept at the graveside of a friend—ordinary walking around in flesh and blood things—that is until the wine ran out, until he blessed the loaves on that hillside, until he cried “Lazarus come forth” and then what we saw was glory. We saw transcendence—something of the neighborhood from which he came and the life he shared with his father.

As he was among us he visited several of our neighborhoods. The first--according to John’s gospel—was Bethany beyond the Jordan. John the Baptist was there and had been telling everyone the good news about Jesus’ arrival. So there was a lot of excitement and anticipation in the air. Why it’s the kind of event that you would turn on the evening news to catch. You might even go where John was in hopes of seeing this Son of God—this Word made flesh.

And that is exactly what the religious leaders in Jerusalem did—they sent priests and Levites to check it out.

Can you imagine the moment when Jesus is seen for the first time? When he steps onto the center stage of history and speaks for the first time—and it is in your neighborhood? You can bet that all the major networks were there. Why Anderson Cooper was embedded with the priests and levites and if you were wondering where Matt Lauer was that week—he was in Bethany beyond the Jordan. Even Katie Couric was there hoping to get an interview with him. She had interviewed John last week—do you see that—wearing his camel skin and all—Why Emeril even featured recipes using locust and wild honey.

Finally the moment came—When the eternal word made flesh spoke for the first time in this gospel. What would you expect him to say? Anderson Cooper was hoping for something about the Roman Occupation – maybe even a deadline for when it would end. Lou Dobbs was hoping he would say something about the illegal alien problem with the Samaritans crossing the border.

I would expect him to say something like blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. But no—when two of John’s disciples push through the crowds and onlookers to approach Jesus, he turns to them and says something very ordinary. He asks a question—“What are you looking for”

This question would certainly give the experts on the news analyst shows something to talk about. But I like what our own Dr. Marrs said on Meet the Press—I think this is a question that examines the motives for discipleship.

This question carries Jesus into many neighborhoods—Samaria, Jerusalem, Cana, and he finds people who are looking for many things. As he talks with a woman in Samaria it is clear that she is looking for a living spring so that she will no longer have to come to Jacob’s well at a public hour in public space alone to draw water. As Jesus and his disciples go to Capernaum a crowd follows and they are looking for Jesus. But Jesus says they are only looking for him because they ate their fill of the loaves on that hillside.

Then he says something important for them and for us—“Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” What were they looking for? They sought after Jesus NOT because he is the bread of life but because he offered them bread to eat and water from a spring. But loaves and fish are not like the bread come down from heaven that we might eat and live. Water from a spring or from Jacob’s well (while necessary for life in the neighborhood) is not like the spirit of God that wells up within us to eternal life.

Do you see? He came into our neighborhood and participated in our lives but he also came to share his life—to give us Life that does not perish.

Let's go to another neighborhood with Jesus. Actually, it is a garden, outside Jerusalem. The crowds have all left—the media is still buzzing—there is a lot to report here—interviews with the soldier who pierced his side, the servant girl who heard Peter deny him—legal analysts on all the channels discussing the trial—surely Ken Starr and Doug Kmiec would be invited on NBC or CBS.

But the lonely figure of Mary Magdalene stands weeping before a tomb—now empty. Through her tears she sees someone she presumes is the gardener. As we look closer we see the risen Lord and hear him speak. He asks a question. The question in the garden is similar to but different from the question on the banks of the Jordan. In the garden he asks, “For whom are you looking?”

As you leave us we hope you find what you are looking for. For some of you I know it includes a good job, for others an acceptance letter from graduate school, and for many you are looking for the love of your life. We hope you find them. But as you go remember this:

If you want to see God, to behold his glory, to know and receive his life—if he is your desire then the question is not what are you looking for—

but for whom are you looking. For these cannot be found in things that are perishing. If your desire is to know God and be where he is—then the question is for whom are you looking because life and fellowship with God are found in a person, Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal word made flesh who invites you to share his life, to dwell where he dwells, to be part of his neighborhood.

God go with you—and I hope you find what you are looking for.