

As we shake off the lingering effects of Christmas and New Year celebrations, we find ourselves back in Ordinary Time for the next 4 weeks or so. Today is the year of Mark, but, due to the fact that Mark's gospel is rather short, we will frequently dip into the gospel of John, which is always a treat. Today is no exception, featuring one of the most fascinating, multi-layered stories of the text. When you read John's gospel, bring a shovel, for there is always a lot to dig into.

The scene is easy to picture. John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples and here comes Jesus. John's observation is cryptic, "Behold, the Lamb of God." What does he mean? Is he saying that Jesus is meek and mild, like a young sheep? I don't think so. In five short words, John ties Jesus into the entire sacrificial covenantal relationship between God and the Hebrew people. What saved the Hebrew first-born from the avenging angel in Egypt? The blood of a lamb smeared on a doorpost. It is commemorated every year at Passover, an unblemished lamb slaughtered, bled, and eaten in remembrance of God's saving action. John is graced with the knowledge that Jesus is the final lamb to be sacrificed, the final sin offering, the final sign of God's saving action. Andrew and the unnamed disciple *get it* immediately. Intrigued by these words, they follow after Jesus, and he in turn asks the question that every one of us carries in our heart, "What are you looking for?"

Take that question right now and put it in your heart. *What are you looking for?* Do you feel an ache? Do you feel a longing? Do you feel a little frustrated? Don't beat yourself up – we're all in the same boat. All of us are keenly aware that we may *be* in this world, but we are not *of* this world. Something is missing. The search for wholeness drives our entire existence, and we often find ourselves parroting the line from the U2 song, "I still haven't found what I'm looking for." That can be a very disconcerting statement to make when you're 60 years old – I doubt your spouse would appreciate hearing that! But most of us, if we're honest, can relate to that feeling. Something is missing. Let's give it a name, shall we? Purpose. *Purpose.*

If you look up purpose in the dictionary, the first meaning is startling and direct – *purpose is the reason for which something exists*. So here's the key question, "What is your purpose in life?" This may cause some pew squirming, but I suspect that most of us would haltingly say something like, "Well, right now, it's raising a family. Or, taking care of elderly parents.

Or, getting through school. Or, trying to launch a business.” All completely understandable answers, and yet, I wonder if those activities are bringing you joy? If they aren’t, then it can’t be your purpose in life. Purpose, for it to be real and life giving, must be utterly consistent with God’s plan for you, or it is simply a temporary placeholder.

There are times in our lives when the search for purpose is acutely focused and powerful. It often occurs in our younger years, perhaps after high school or college. It arises again when we find ourselves with empty nests or in mid-life crisis. Don’t fear it – such intense restlessness is an invitation from God to find your purpose. You are acting exactly as Andrew and the unnamed disciple (feel free to substitute your name) are. They are seeking purpose, and an intriguing opportunity to find it suddenly arises. If you find yourself here right now, all I can say is trust the journey. Discern, take risks, pray to God for guidance. He loves those kinds of requests, believe me.

But what if you’re not 18 or 22 or free from kid chores? What if your life is scheduled and locked down? When Jesus walks by John and the two disciples, there are probably a hundred people or more who are in the direct vicinity. Why aren’t they following Jesus? Why aren’t they asking the difficult questions? Why aren’t they aware of the opportunity? Simple enough. They’re working hard, feeding their families, watching the grandkids, trying to survive. They have no time to seek their purpose. Life has not been that generous to them. They wish that they had the luxury of time to go seek their purpose. But too many other lives depend on them. It wouldn’t be right to abandon these very necessary chores. Sound familiar?

Remember my definition of purpose. Purpose is the reason you exist, and for purpose to be a source of joy, it must be consistent with God’s plan for you. Is it possible to seek and find purpose while your life is a never-ending list of chores? Is it possible to find purpose when choices seem constrained and close-ended? I think you know the answer – yes! Bringing God into your life reveals purpose, reveals who you are in God’s eyes. How do you do that?

Pray – always possible, no matter what. There are so many ways to pray. Grace before meals, prayers with your kids before bedtime, a rosary for a special intention, daily Mass, or simply sitting in meditation. Make it a family affair. As an ordained deacon, I pray the Divine Office each day. To be honest, it’s not my preferred method of prayer, and I often find my mind

drifting as I recite the psalms of the day. So I've added a simple touch. After my morning prayer, I pick up the daily newspaper and I "pray" the front page – asking for God to grace each person and situation that makes the headlines. And yes, as you can imagine, one or two people seem to get prayed for a lot!

Study – I'm an avid reader, so this is easy for me. I usually have 2 or 3 books going at once, and I try to achieve a balance among escapism, reality, and spiritual topics. So this week I'm reading a sci-fi thriller, a book on prison reform, and Fr. Greg Boyle's latest book. Of course, every 3 weeks or so, I dive into Bible study and commentary as I attempt to carve some meaning out of the Sunday readings to share with you. Books may be hard for you to get into – no problem – seek other ways to learn. Maybe a podcast or a Catholic radio station like Immaculate Heart Radio.

Act - Where? Hint – look at the borderlands. Look to the hard places. My mother, in the midst of raising 7 kids, volunteered to man a pregnancy crisis hotline one night a week. I was in my early teens when she started this, and I remember thinking, "Those girls are in big trouble now, because Mom is tough on us when we do wrong." But one day, I overheard her end of a conversation with a young pregnant teen. Her loving concern was so evident, so filled with empathy, so non-judgmental – could this be my Mom? Yes, it was her true self shining through.

It doesn't take much to bring God into your daily life. Think small, don't make it a contest. Some intentional prayer, some intentional study, some small acts of kindness outside of your usual group of family and friends – these practices will allow God to nudge and inform you of your purpose. You may be surprised to find that God loves you just exactly where you are. But don't be surprised if he nudges you to change course, even if just a little. Remember that it takes 3 miles for the Queen Mary to make a 90 degree turn while at full speed. It may take you some miles to make that turn as well.

Still a bit unsure? Still a bit unclear on your purpose? Keep your eyes on Jesus. His words today are especially appropriate. When asked "Where are you staying?" his answer is meant to intrigue and invite, "Come and you will see..."