

At this point, you all know how deeply I love Michigan. My feelings for my home state run deep and constant. I will take a Great Lake over an ocean any day—as we say, no salt, no sharks, therefore no worries. I love my sports teams and the snow and just the general vibe of being home. I have been in Virginia for almost ten years and yet I am still a Michigander at heart. And for me, and I would say for most of my family, there is no better place in Michigan than being Up North. Now, ask ten people in Michigan what Up North means to them and you will get ten different answers. It is somewhere *north*, wherever your family tends to stake their vacation claim. For me, Up North is over the Zilwaukee Bridge and on towards Mackinac Island, but it's a big state and there is plenty of Up North to be found.

Now, one of the hidden gems of Up North are the Sleeping Bear Dunes. Y'all, I love the Outer Banks, and I love me some Jockey's Ridge, however, I will see your sand dunes and raise you our dunes, some of which are actually like borderline illegal to climb because it will take you five hours to scale back up them and if park rangers have to come rescue you, good luck. Now, when I was little my family took a trip to the Dunes, and it was amazing, and you can ask my dad and Jennifer about the effort to scale an illegal dune—Jenn broke a ring climbing this thing, however, there was one thing that was less than amazing, and does give me one piece of advice

if you ever wander Up North with no plan. If you see a hotel named the Sleeping Bear Motel, don't do it, this is not the hotel you are looking for. Find somewhere else to lay your head, might I even recommend your car.

This was long before the days of smart phones and being able to pull up a metric ton of reviews online to make sure you're getting what you're looking for, and apparently long before the days of making reservations before you go anywhere, I don't know, I was little, and do this day have no clue how these things happened to my family sometimes. Suffice it to say, there we were, vacation ready, Up North, life is good and we found ourselves checking in at ye old Sleeping Bear...and...my dad can 100% confirm this...it was a nightmare. Now, I'm sure the family lore of it all has built it up in my brain, but this was not the hotel you wanted to stay it. There may have been bugs, I could have been something out of a Dateline episode, all I know is that in my memory, this was the most horrifying hotel we could have opted for. Creepy, scary, not comfortable, in short, if you were asked what are you looking for when it comes to accommodations, this ain't it, and as I read the gospel for this week, I kept thinking, what if the disciples had asked Jesus where he was staying and he said the ancient Israel equivalent of the Sleeping Bear. I think I would have said, this is *not* what I'm looking for and attempted to find a Messiah with better lodging

instincts, but this is where my brain goes when the gospel leaves so much open ended for us, and John does that in spades this morning.

We come into John's gospel in the early days of Jesus' ministry this morning. We basically get John's version of Jesus' baptism, but mostly through John the Baptist's perspective. He confirms that he is the one that did it and that he saw the Spirit descending on Jesus during the baptism, so John's testimony and ministry has really shifted to pointing directly at Jesus and saying this is your guy. You aren't here for me, you have been here for him, and now that he's here that's where your focus should be. And we see this play out in real time as John is standing there with two of his disciples, one of whom we later learn is Andrew, Peter's brother. They see Jesus and John says, there is the Lamb of God, there's your guy, and so the two disciples kind of shrug and go, ok, let's see what all this is about and start following Jesus.

Now, what happens next has become one of my favorite moments in scripture, honestly. I kind of picture them walking behind Jesus, not 100% committed to this new path and kind of whispering and bickering and wondering and I imagine Jesus turning around and them just stopping in their tracks like, uh oh, we've been caught. Especially in John, we might expect that Jesus is going to use this as some huge opportunity for teaching

and getting all wordy, but instead, he asks one question, “What are you looking for?” He leaves it open to them, he wants to know what is in their hearts, what is tugging them to leave John back there and stake their claim with him instead. All they say is one word, “Teacher,” and then ask where he is staying. An indication they will follow. They’re looking for guidance, for direction, for learning, their hearts are longing for *something*, and they try to put that all into one little word. Now, again, wordy Jesus has the prime opportunity to cease the moment, you want a teacher? I will give you teaching! But he doesn’t...all he says is, “Come and see.” Now, we don’t know what kind of hotel, motel, hole in the wall Jesus led them to, but we know something stuck. They found what they were looking for because the next day Andrew goes and finds Peter and tells him he has found more than a teacher, he has found the Messiah, and the rest is, well, history.

There is something so beautifully open-ended about this whole story that just makes me love it and makes me realize that so often, we as the church get it wrong, and could actually stand to take a lesson from what happens in this interaction. I think we all would agree that there is a certain amount of investment as the church in bringing more people in, right? I don’t think you could find a church anywhere that would tell you that they aren’t interested in growing, but I think we all also know that our reasons for

that desire aren't always gospel oriented. We want to grow so we look good compared to our neighbors. Other churches might be dwindling but look at us. We want to grow so that there's more money in the plate, money to more often than not spend on things that have nothing to actually do with ministry or church. We want to grow so that we can remain, not change of course, but remain where we are, firmly planted. We want to grow so that we don't die, but we don't want to grow in ways that will make us expand beyond our comfort zones. We want to grow with people who come in our doors, settle comfortably into what we believe, and don't push the boundaries, don't ask questions, don't dare us to think or do something different, and yet that is the exact opposite of what happens in our gospel.

Jesus doesn't tell this disciples what they *should* be looking for. He wants to know what they are looking for. He genuinely asks them, why are you following me, what are you hoping to gain from this, and he doesn't correct them or tell them that they need to look for something different, he just invites them in, come and see if what I have to offer is what can reach your heart. It is evangelism at its simplest. He doesn't ask them who they are, what they believe, what their relationship with God is like, *why* they're searching. He just asks them to ponder in their hearts what they're looking for. And he doesn't even tell them what they'll find. He just says, come and

see. Figure it out for yourselves. Come investigate. Ask questions, see what you can find, and we'll figure it out together. So often, we as the church are interested in telling people what they're looking for, what they should be looking for and what they should get out of it, that we prevent ourselves from actually connecting with our neighbor and finding out the new thing that God is doing in their lives.

I mean let's be real, we aren't all here for the same reason this morning. If Jesus came in today and asked what are you looking for, there would probably be as many different answers as there are people in the pews. Rest, quiet, prayer, time out of my own head, music, community, to see my friends, communion, obligation, because my parents made me, I don't even know why I'm here, and none of those answers would be wrong. None of those answers would make Jesus say well maybe leave and come back and try again later. To all of those answers, Jesus would say come in and see what you find. But what would *we* say to each other? I dare to think that we all would try to tell each other why we should be here, or what we could get out of this morning, as opposed to recognizing that God has called us all here for innumerable reasons and we're all going to get out of it something different and that's ok. The church doesn't have to be one thing to everyone and when we try to make it do that, we become less come and

see and more sit down and listen. Jesus has always been about the invitation and we as God's people need to get back in the business of leaving that invitation open-ended.

In Isaiah, God tells God's people that they are being given as a light to the nations so that salvation may reach the ends of the earth. God doesn't tell them how to shine, what kind of light needs to be shone, just that they need to be a beacon, a lighthouse, a place where the world can find rest, sanctuary, and hope. Come and see, who knows what the light might illumine for you. Come and see, and I'll accompany you as we walk. Come and see, and we might end up at different destinations, but we'll get where we each need to be.

What are you looking for? Maybe you're just looking for a motel that will get you through the night because it's dark and late and any bed will do and you'll keep going the next morning. Maybe you're looking for a safe haven. Maybe you're looking for somewhere where you can set down roots and finally rest. Maybe you're looking for a fixer upper that is excited to rearrange the furniture and see what new thing you can do. What are you looking for? Home, refuge, strength, peace, a call to action, justice, quiet. What are you looking for? Community, hope, friends. Whatever it is you are looking for, come and see, the light is on. **AMEN!!!**