My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our grateful hearts, minds, Spirits, and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Most children in America are given the gift of music at a young age. From our earliest days just out of the womb we are surrounded by the babbles and coos of our loved ones who are telling us that we, too, are loved and adored. Mothers sing to us lullabys that enchant each generation—do we know some of them?

Hush little Baby, Don’t say a word….(singing)

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star…

Rock-a-Bye Baby, on the tree top…

Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques, Dormez-vous?...

Ok, that was fun. And the lullabys of today are so much nicer than the ones of yesteryear. Imagine singing the words to Brahms’ lullaby to a baby today? Nice tune, but those words will make anyone overhearing you wonder about exactly what your parenting perspective might be.

But they are instructive nonetheless. For while we seek the comfort of our mothers, fathers, and other parent figures, as we get older we begin to realize larger questions about ourselves and that our lives are not always under our control. We learn this in a lot of ways, don’t we? Illness or injury. Job loss. Divorce. Sudden and unexpected death of a friend or loved one.

We start to see these large questions pop up in our life and consciousness. Music has always been a big deal for me in terms of my life phases and moods. In my younger years was a big fan of Simon and Garfunkel’s “I Am A Rock”. (singing a few lines). Pretty dark.

Later on, I returned to the Motown sound and focused in on not just Marvin, Smokey, and Stevie, but on the fabulous Diana Ross. Not the “Stop in the Name of Love” stuff. But the theme from Mahogany. Now, I know we alllll remember that, but I’ll remind you:

* Do you know where you're going to?
* Do you like the things that life is showing you?
* Where are you going to?
* Do you know?
* Do you get what you're hoping for?
* When you look behind you, there's no open doors,
* What are you hoping for?
* Do you know?

Now ***there’s*** some deep questions, and we can only hope that younger folks are asking those same questions, rather than the darker tomes of Art Garfunkel.

These questions of identity and direction that are scattered throughout our Great American Songbook also reflect Jesus’ questions in our text today, don’t they?

Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of John is a question. And one that can be invitational if spoken a kind manner, or confrontational if spoken another way. “What do you want?” Or in other translations, “What do you seek? What are you looking for?”

(Singing) Do you know where you’re going to?

It’s a good question, isn’t it? Maybe THE question, if we discount all those little cartoons with a guru on a mountaintop being asked, “what is the meaning of life”?

When someone shows up in church for the first time, what are they looking for? Do se remember the first time we entered a church in a new location or city…what is it that led us to that particular church?

What are we looking for? Direction? Meaning? I had a couple in the church I served that told me they came for coffee 35 years ago and never left. Newly married folks at another church wanted to quit watching Netflix all the time, and wondered where they might find human contact and something different outside of their work lives.

Are we looking for something spiritual? When we ask to get baptized or married in a church or by a pastor, what are we hoping to do in that act at that place or by that person? A reminder of what’s sacred? Blessings for life’s incredible journey? To feel like we’re starting out well, whether that’s right or left-footed, or jumping all in to the deep end of the pool, but hoping we can swim?

In John’s Gospel, Jesus always asks questions, and not the easy ones. He’s always taking us from the little surface conversations into existential questions.

Where in John’s Gospel do these questions happen? A woman at the well talks about water. What does Jesus do? He starts talking about living water, or spiritual need. Jesus gives sight to a blind man, and the crowd’s amazed. But Jesus talks about spiritual blindness, right? And remember when Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, Jesus starts talking about being born again. Nicodemus thinks this is a physical thing, but Jesus is talking about spiritual rebirth. Jesus always seeks to shift us out of our comfort zone to something that shakes up our existence. THAT’s what we’re talking about when we say these are existential questions. The new year is the best time to take inventory of our lives and see if we are answering those questions we should see. (singing) Do you get what you’re hoping for, when you look behind you there’s no open door…what are you hoping for? Do you know?

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

What makes life worth living? I know what we say. It’s about relationships, and many of us would say family. Jesus says it’s bigger than that, just as God expands our minds and hearts. Relationship with God comes first.

Relationship with God is relationship with presence outside ourselves, which is why Jesus says love of family is great, but let’s get outside our trusted clan and start to love our neighbor. At the end of our lives, it’s hard to say what possessions made our life worth living. All that gets sold off. It will be about relationships, the love we gave and the love we received. We come to church to learn about God’s promises and follow Christ’s teachings to keep us focused on what matters.

“Where are you staying?”, John’s disciples ask. Where do you abide? Where do you dwell Jesus? We want to be there, and John told us to go there, wherever that is. “Come and See”, Jesus says to them. Abide in my love, he says. That’s what we are looking for. Show us the way. Because as Christians, although we can lament along with most folk singers, we also know that the darkness doesn’t stay. But we need a guiding light. And a guiding light overcomes the darkness every time, and cannot be ignored for long.

Thanks be to God, Amen.