

2 Epiphany
John 1:29-42
The Rev. Deacon Joshua Nelson
15 January 2017

How many of you have ever enjoyed going for a walk, or heading out on a hike? It's something that I really like to do! It's a great way to clear your head, and get a little exercise, and it is where I often find the most clarity, when I'm seeking answers or needing to destress. It is where I often find God in a deeper way.

As a student at Lee I would get up in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep and walk all over campus. (It was a lot smaller back then). Or when I was really stressed out I would drive out to the Olympic Park and hike the trails or dip my feet in the waters of the Ocoee.

Last summer there were many changes happening in my life. I had recently made pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I was getting a new Bishop (and all that entails). I was coming up on my final year of Seminary, looking toward ordination, graduation, and an eventual call. There was a lot of things happening and a lot to take in. The future wasn't exactly clear, and that's difficult for someone who likes to plan ahead. So this summer I had to begin asking myself a variation on the question Jesus poses to the apostles in today's Gospel, "What am I looking for?" and "Where do I go from here?"

To help with the stress and anxiety, I made retreat at one of my favorite places, St Gregory's Abbey in Three Rivers, Michigan. The monastery is in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by woods and tree farms. There is absolutely no cell coverage, and nothing ever changes. For an introvert like me, it is beautiful. It is a great place to be alone and think.

One day I decided to take a hike. There are many meandering trails all over the property. Most of them I know very well from my previous visits, but on this day I had the need to get lost. I needed to find new places and to not know where I was going.

Now I was a Boy Scout, so I went prepared. I put on some good shoes, grabbed plenty of water, and I knew I could eat my bodyweight in the plethora of wild black raspberries. If I were to get hungry on the way.

I made my way down the familiar path from the monks cemetery to the lake. It was very Robert Frostian. Two roads diverged in a yellow wood . . . To the East, the way to the hermitage that I knew so well, and to the West, a wood I'd left unexplored. This day I took the one less traveled.

For nearly three hours I explored every bend and turn, every tree and bush, and I found every thorn on this path. Sometimes needing to backtrack from a dead end, or avoiding walking across

a farmer's field of soybeans. I did eat nearly my weight in black raspberries, and a few times, I actually got a little scared---a little worried. Because in the deepness of the wood it is difficult to find the sun and I did not know if I was heading toward home or further away. I just had to trust and hope by faith that I would eventually make it back. No trail of breadcrumbs here, I simply had to assess my surroundings and keep pressing forward.

Eventually I emerged from the wood. I found myself at the highway known as Abbey Road. I was roughly a mile south from where I was staying. And like any good Anglican I made it back just in time for tea.

In that walk and the days since I have learned much about my unwarranted need to have all the answers, and my desire to know exactly where I am going, and what I am looking for.

Andrew and the other apostle, had also been looking for answers. They were disciples of John the Baptist, and possibly of one or more other teachers before John. This was not uncommon in the ancient world. Being a disciple was like having Google at our fingertips today. You followed your teacher everywhere so you would always have the answers right at hand.

So when John points out that Jesus is the Lamb of God, this is THE ONE he has been talking about this whole time they've been with him. They decide to follow Jesus---literally--- just following him wherever he goes. No letter of introduction from your former teacher. No interview process, just the creepy, stalker-like, following. . . everywhere.

Eventually Jesus turns around and says "What are you looking for?" The apostles don't answer the question . . . instead, they ask "where are you staying?" Now I don't about you, but that is the last bit of information I want to be giving out to two strange guys who have just started following me around all day. So Jesus response could be seen as an answer to the query posed as to his residence that evening, but imagine with me for a moment, that he is answering the broader question which he posed. What are you looking for? "Come and See!" he says.

This is a tactic that most teachers know well, pose another question, or give a redirection to help the student find, on their own, what they are looking for. Jesus is saying, let me show you what you are looking for. He does this by taking them on the journey. It is in that journey that we find what we are looking for.

When preparing for today's sermon I noticed the question Jesus poses to the apostles. This seems to run in the vain of new year's goals or resolutions. So with that in mind I decided to hit Facebook and do a little "Sermon Crowdsourcing" I used a public forum and asked "**As a Christian, or just in life this next year, what are you looking for?**" and I would pose the same

question to you today, “What are you looking for?” I got a number of responses and one of my favorite being a search for “a good heavenly single malt scotch” but that was an outlier. The rest of the answers seemed to have a theme of commonality.

There were things like,

“I am looking for help me to cultivate kindness”

“I am looking for ways to add value to others lives”

“I am seeking understanding of God’s calling on my life”

“I am looking for ways to be challenged in faith and action”

“I am looking for ways to become a better servant”

“I am looking for the means of patience to listen to the stories of other” and for a “practical hope, hope and faith and love put into action.”

Eventually the Apostles came around to asking similar questions “where is the greatest need?”, “how might I share the good news?” And probably the scariest question of all “What does it take and does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus” The lessons learned, the actions practiced, and the opportunities met, all came while on the journey. By following Jesus wherever he went and imitating his life. And the continuing journey of bearing witness to Jesus after his resurrection.

We find ourselves on this journey. As we go into the new year it is important for us to recognize in ourselves and in others that everyone is on their own journey.

We may not always know exactly what direction we are headed, where the next turn will take us, or who we will meet along the way. We may have to backtrack. We may find the thorns. And at times we feel lost, but that’s okay. The important point is to COME AND SEE! Take a moment, take a deep breath. Assess the surroundings, and move forward. Look for the opportunities and take them. Do not be afraid of the unknown path. God knows where you are

I recently found this quote by Thomas Merton which I have since printed off and put by my desk at school. I look at it every day and take its words to heart and live out what it says. It goes like this . . .

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.”

So when you ask that question, sometimes all you can do is ut one foot in front of the other, trust God, because he stands in front of us beckoning, “Come and See.”

AMEN

