

Sermon

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St. John the Evangelist

1/15/17

Epiphany II: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Cor 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Think of your very favorite book and for our purposes this morning, limit it to Fiction. Maybe it is a book from your childhood, or one from a pivotal moment in your life. Maybe it's a book you return to over and over, maybe it's one you read once and it resounds in your mind still. Maybe it's a book based in reality or maybe it is an imaginary world created for you to escape into. Now, I'm no magician, but I will now magically reveal that for the majority of you, the story you are thinking of has, as some major part of its plot, a journey.

Journeys are the substance of most of the great stories humanity has produced. The Odyssey, the Canterbury Tales, Dante's Inferno, Moby Dick, The Lord of the Rings, even Harold and the Purple Crayon. The journey is where the adventure is, where growth happens, where truths—truths about the world, about oneself, and about the universe—are revealed.

Something about the trope of a "journey," speaks to our hearts and awakens our imaginations in highly effective ways. And it is because of that that the most common metaphor used to describe one's relationship with God is a "journey." We say, that "we are on a spiritual journey," because something about that image matches the passage of time, the evolution of thought, and the surprises and adventures we experience in our life with God.

This language of "spiritual journey," is not exclusively Christian, but it is particularly appropriate for our tradition because Jesus is constantly on the move. The primary mark of a disciple is someone who is following, following him across the Judean countryside, up and back from Jerusalem and so on and so on.

This morning we hear Jesus calling his first disciples to this journey, a journey they are neither expecting nor prepared for. Andrew and another disciple have been hanging around with John the Baptist. And John points to Jesus saying "That guy. That's the guy I've been telling you about. He's the one we've been waiting for." And so Andrew and his friend take off and start following Jesus.

Upon noticing these two men trailing him, Jesus turns around and asks them a question that begins their journey, that sets the entire narrative in motion, a question as simple as it is profound: "What are you looking for?" These are Jesus' first recorded words in the Gospel of John. And they go straight to the heart of the matter. What are you looking for?

Most journeys are motivated by this one question. Odysseus is looking for home. Ahab is looking for the White Whale. Frodo is looking for the place to destroy the ring. And Harold is looking for his window. The main character is looking for something. It's not always an external thing, sometimes its clarity, or adventure, or peace, but that searching, seeking energy is what drives the plot. And this goes for spiritual journeys as well.

What are *you* looking for? How would you answer that question? Everyone is looking for something. And more and more, I find in conversations with people, that they are looking for

something deep, something true, something meaningful that touches their lives on a level that the rest of the world does not. This is the seed of spiritual growth: a desire to seek something more. What is it for you? What are you looking for? In the unfolding narrative of your life, what is the thing that is driving you on, pushing you forward?

It can be really hard to articulate an answer to this question. Most of the time we have a general sense of searching without specifics in mind. But it's important to try and answer because otherwise your journey is aimless, it has no direction. Tomorrow we celebrate a man most famous for his ability to articulate clearly and with passion, what it was he was looking for, the dream that he had. And it was in that clear and powerful articulation that his dream inspired and continues to inspire millions. That's what can happen if you can come up with a clear answer to what it is you are looking for. It can give shape to your journey and possibly give shape to the journeys of others as well. So another way of asking "What are you looking for?" might be, "What is your dream?" in The Rev. Dr. King's sense of the word.

But sometimes we need help answering this question. The disciples certainly did. When asked by Jesus, "What are you looking for?" the disciples can't quite say. The best they can come up with is an artful dodge: "Where are you staying?" which isn't an answer to his question at all, probably because they can't articulate what exactly they're really looking for.

Picking up on this, Jesus graciously says to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, they remained with him for that day, and by the end of their time with him, they knew what they were looking for. Andrew runs to tell his brother Simon that they have indeed found The Messiah.

Come to Jesus, and you will see. Bring your questing soul to him and spend time with him. Spend time reading about him. Spend time talking to him. Spend time praying to him. And like those first disciples it will become clear what you are looking for.

Jesus is big enough to hold the answers to all that you could ask of him. His presence is broad enough to encompass all that you could possibly be looking for in your life. Whatever it is—meaning, purpose, direction, strength, fulfillment, hope, joy, love, peace, whatever it is—he has it for you in abundance. He has enough wisdom to stimulate your mind, enough compassion to guide your heart, and enough example to motivate your life. Come to him, abide with him, search him out and know him and you will find what it is you are looking for.

Usually in the great journeys of our literature, the story ends when the main character finds what he or she is looking for. But spiritual journeys are different. As Jesus shows us what it is we are looking for and leads us to it, we become aware that there are more chapters ready to begin. As we set out looking for the things that will keep us going deeper in our lives, we must recognize that we are never finished, that our spiritual wanderings will never cease because there will always be more that Jesus has in store for us. He promises to show us greater and more wonderful things for having followed him. This means that as his disciples, while we live on this earth, we are never done searching and seeking. It means our journey is ongoing. Jesus is always calling us on, pointing us on to something more. He is always a few steps ahead of us on the path, turning around every so often to check on us, beckoning us on with the insistent invitation "Come and see," until that fateful day when he will lead us safely to our journey's end.