

January 19, 2020

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Year A

Three Questions

“What time is it? What are you looking for?

Where are you staying?”

For me, I think these are three important questions in these passages. I couldn't decide which to preach about, so I decided to on all three questions.

What time is it?

“It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.” What is up with that? This is a tough one if you know anything about John. The importance of light and darkness, what light and dark represent. But four o'clock in the afternoon? Is it still light? Getting dark? What time of the year is this again? If the meaning isn't something about being in the light or being in the dark, believing or not believing, why mention the time of day when these first disciples get to hang out with Jesus?

Since the incarnation is at the heart of John's Gospel, that the Word became flesh, time matters and marking time matters. Life happens in time and we remember life with time. Important events are not general references -- we don't say, "our wedding was in the evening sometime" or "our baby was born sometime in the morning" or "grandpa died sometime in the afternoon." No, we remember these moments with particularity. It was a Tuesday. It was 5:01. The event started at 4:00.

"I remember the specific moment he said that he loved me. I remember the exact moment she walked across the stage to accept her diploma. I remember the particular moment when I heard my diagnosis. I remember the precise moment when I heard about..."

My oldest son Stavros first saw his birth certificate he was quite fascinated, reading all of the details. He knew his birth date, but never knew the time he was born. "I was born at 8:03?" he asked. "Yes, you were. I remember the moment like it was yesterday. You see...." And off I launched into the chronology of his birth. Of course, he quickly lost

interest when I talked about the benefits of an epidural. But I think he got it. Life happens in time. He happened in time.

There are events in your life that time has to acknowledge. What are your personal events? What are your communal events? What are our national events? What are our global events? that then time helps us remember. Helps us feel. Helps us know that it mattered. Time anchors the event.

No wonder the time of the first encounter with Jesus had to be recorded. There's no way you can forget that kind of moment, right? When did you first meet Jesus? "Well, it was about four o'clock in the afternoon...."

Can you name the time when you first met Jesus? Name the time you first realized how much Jesus loves you? Name the time when you knew that a life of ministry, officially or voluntarily, ordained or lay, was how you needed to be in the world?

For me, it was a Friday evening in the small chapel of a catholic school. I was there as a participate at a Curriceo. We were there for a

long weekend. There was music and speakers and worship services. It was a weekend that I will never forget. It was when I met Jesus and opened my heart so he would enter.

Time matters in this story, not just to mark time, but to remind us of God's time. That God entered into time when God didn't have to. That God chose to be limited by time when God didn't need to. That God decided time matters when omnipresence could give God a very easy out.

For these first disciples, about four o'clock in the afternoon was their first time, by invitation from Jesus, to abide. Not just to come and see, but to come and be. Outside of Jesus' baptism in John 1:32-33 in reference to the Spirit, 1:39 is the first occurrence of the verb abide in John. Used no less than forty-plus times in John it is the primary word to describe the intimate relationship into which Jesus invites us.

To abide is to belong. To abide is to be saved (John 4:42). To abide is to be assured of a future with God (John 14:2). To abide is to feel a real and committed relationship (John 15:1-17). No wonder you

remember four o'clock in the afternoon. Your first abiding with the Word of God can't be some generic memory.

And presence in time is the promise of Epiphany. The incarnation anticipates and even demands timely matters. Why? Because time matters to God and our times matter deeply to God.

What are you looking for?

I am intrigued by Jesus' response to the two disciples who took it upon themselves to follow Jesus when they heard John say "Look, here is the Lamb of God." (Jn. 1:36) Jesus turned to them and asked "What are you looking for?" (Jn. 1:37)

The question raised by Jesus sets off an interesting turn of events wherein the two disciples go and spend time with Jesus at his dwelling. Andrew, one of the followers, evangelizes to his brother Peter and says "We have found the Messiah." (Jn. 1:41) What prompted Andrew and, presumably, the beloved disciple to follow Jesus?

Did they follow in the words of Archbishop William Temple, "as do most of us, because of what they have heard another say. We are

Christians because we have been taught; and those who taught us were taught themselves.” My sense is that they followed because of a deep thirst to drink from the fountain of life (Jn. 4:13) Andrew and the beloved disciple are open enough to hear the words of John the Baptist because they long for something deeper.

While following John the Baptist was a stop on their pilgrimage, they recognized that John’s teaching was not their final destination. Their openness to an experience beyond the mundane is a fundamental existential longing for deeper meaning.

Whether the character is John the Baptist, Andrew, the beloved disciple, Nathanael, Nicodemus, or Thomas, the existential longing for meaning can only be quenched when one comes to a profound understanding of truth. The nature of moving from the mundane to the potency of Ultimate Truth is through following Jesus. The vision is for seekers of the Truth to recognize that the divine self-giving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ is the effective medium through which the world is redeemed. As the first chapter began with Andrew and the

beloved disciple following Jesus, the resurrected Lord beckons Peter to “follow.” (Jn. 21) In other words, the mark of recognizing the Ultimate Truth is the unconditional vocation to follow Jesus.

What are we looking for? The answer to this question depends on our basic orientation towards and understanding of Truth. If our orientation is rooted in self-centeredness and the accumulation of wealth and power for its own sake. If we are looking for an authentic experience rooted in the vision of a new heaven and earth bridged by the reconciling work of God manifest in the redemptive work of Christ, we are looking for a relationship centered on Jesus, who proclaimed himself to be the way, the truth, and the life. The movement from looking to following is what we, as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, are called to emulate. Once we have witnessed the Ultimate Truth, the call for us becomes to follow.

In following, we center ourselves in the discipline of grappling with the worldview set forth by the architect of the Kingdom. Being centered on this world view, our call is to work towards the building of a

New Heaven and New Earth where “the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; for he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.” (Rev. 21:3-5)

Where are you staying?

Whenever I invite people over, I check the apartment. Is everything relatively neat and clean? Laundry hanging anywhere. Kitchen counters cleared. Magazines and books straightened? If people show up unexpectedly, they get what they get, and it might not be pretty. As small as my apartment is, the bed might not be made, Sweetness is the last one out of bed, but she never makes the bed. Sweetness is my 9-pound Chi-winnie. The desk might be cluttered with papers, might even have a few dishes in the sink or Sweetness' toys spread out on the floor, she really needs to learn to pick up her toys. She will pull every toy out of her bin until she finds the one, she wants to play with. I could even be embarrassed that things aren't as perfect as I'd like them to appear.

John has his characters answer a question with a question. As a couple of disciples begin to tail Jesus after his baptism, this happens:

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” [from John 1]

Then Jesus invites them to “come and see.” We have only our imaginations to guess what they find when they visit Jesus at home.

It is likely the Sabbath, because it appears they stay overnight. Do they see him interacting with family? Hosting the Sabbath meal? Praying over the food? Singing a psalm? Laughing at a joke? Telling stories? Do they see him sharing leftovers with the poor? Talking to unclean people on the way home? Talking about what to do about a widowed neighbor or a depressed friend? Do they hear some of his teaching, or is just seeing how he lives on a random day life-changing enough?

Whatever they experience, it is interesting or moving enough for them to tell some others about it, and to give them the same invitation to come and see.

So I wonder.

What would people see if they came on short notice to my home?

Or to yours?

It is just that simple, it is just that hard.

Thanks be to God.