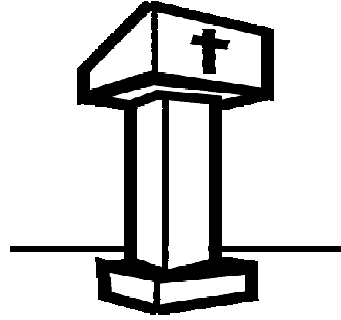


Sermon Synopsis –
Epiphany 2A Sermon
January 16, 2011
Preached by Fr. Peter Champion



“I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” (words and music by U2)

I have climbed the highest mountains
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you.

I have run, I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you.

(Refrain)
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found
What I'm looking for.

I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in her finger tips
It burned like fire
Burning desire.

I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night
I was cold as a stone.

(Refrain)
I believe in the Kingdom Come
Then all the colours will bleed into one
Bleed into one.
But yes, I'm still running.

You broke the bonds
And you loosed the chains
Carried the cross of my shame
Oh my shame, you know I believe it.

(Refrain)

At every Narcotics Anonymous meeting I’ve attended for almost 19 years, I’ve heard a reading entitled “How it Works.” I’ve heard it enough times that I could recite the entire reading to you from memory, but today I’ll share only the first paragraph with you:

“If you want what we have to offer and are willing to make the effort to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps. These are the principles that made our recovery possible.”

From there, we read the 12 steps, with which I suspect most of you are at least somewhat familiar. Originally written by Bill W. and other early members of AA, AA has generously allowed the steps to be used by people seeking recovery from scores of other varieties of addiction. For those of us in recovery, these steps are what save our lives and give us a daily reprieve from active addiction. In them, I found what I was looking for, even though I'd only realized my need a few days earlier.

In this morning's Gospel, we hear a story about the first disciples of Jesus and how they came to follow him. If I had to summarize the principle that the Gospel writer is trying to make, I could sum it up using the same words I just shared with you. **“If you want what we have to offer and are willing to make the effort to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps...”** Let's use that sentence as a lens through which to see the story.

John the Baptist had attracted a great crowd of people who were looking for something that the Gospels call repentance—*metanoia*, literally a turning of heart and mind—which set them right with God. The Bible tells us that many people came to be baptized as a sign of their commitment to this change.

Similarly, newcomers show up at 12 step meetings because they've learned (or been told by a judge) that their old way of living isn't working for them anymore. If they don't change, their lives will spiral downwards to destruction. They need to find a different way to live. One of the popular slogans we use says, **“When you're sick and tired of being sick and tired, you'll make some changes.”**

But John made it clear that he was not the agent of change; he pointed not at himself but to the greater one who was to come. The first part of our Gospel reading this morning tells us that Jesus was the greater one towards whom John had been pointing. John pointed out Jesus to two of his (John's) disciples and gave a vivid account of Jesus' baptism, making clear he knew that Jesus was the one he, and all who flocked to him, had been looking for. The two disciples followed Jesus. Noticing them following him, Jesus asked, **“What are you looking for?”** and invited them to **“Come and see.”**

Jesus didn't command them to follow him. He didn't drag them against their will. He invited them to come along with him and see what he had to offer them. The decision to check him out was theirs, as was the decision whether to continue following him. I can almost hear him saying, **“If you think I have what you're looking for—that way of changing course in life that you went to John looking for—come with me and see if it's what you really want.”**

They did go with him, and they did decide he had what they were looking for. In the words and deeds of Jesus, and in his death and resurrection, they found that changed way of being that transformed them down to the depths of their beings.

So what did they do? They shared their experience with others, including Simon Peter. And the rest, as they say, is history.

This picture of Jesus and the first two disciples is pretty consistent with the Jesus we encounter all through the Bible—invitational and not aggressive, lovingly respectful of people’s ability to decide for themselves, but unwavering in his mission to offer people a new way to live. This models one part of what it might look like to follow Jesus.

I wish the Church got this... Invite, share, and let people decide for themselves. At its worst, the Church has played mind games with people—trying to scare the hell out of them—instead of inviting them. And we, good Episcopalians that we are, more often hesitate to even share that which has brought us the gift of healing and new life—because we’re afraid of offending people. Garrison Keillor once said that most Episcopalians (of which he is one, by the way) consider bad taste the worst sin. So we go out of our way to avoid telling people about what God does in our lives, or about the ways Saint John’s enriches and nourishes our spirits.

Actually, for an organization that is rigorously open-minded about people’s conceptions of God, NA gets it much more than we do. We invite people to stick around, read our literature, talk to others, see if the steps work in their lives, and then decide for themselves. And as a fellowship, we’re unwavering about recovery, because we know that it can be a matter of life or death for each one of us. I vividly remember being told, early on, that if NA didn’t make my life better, they’d “**gladly refund my misery.**”

We all know how it feels to be broken in body, or mind, or spirit. We’ve all found ourselves realizing we need to change the path we find ourselves on. We’ve all been hurt by life, and we’ve all hurt others, whether intentionally or accidentally. We all know how it feels to need forgiveness, and how difficult it can be to forgive others. Ultimately, we all know at some level that what we truly need is *metanoia*—changing our way of being. One of the things that makes us human is that recognition that there is something out there we need, and which we often spend our lives looking for.

Today’s Gospel reminds us of the theme of this Epiphany season—that God invites us in Jesus to find that change we need. And not just us, but every human being. Jesus invited the first disciples to come and see what he was up to, then to decide for themselves whether to follow him and tell others about him. As with the first disciples, the choice to follow and to share—or not—is ours. I invite you to follow Jesus and to share with others. We won’t get it right all the time, but that’s ok. As we say at the end of every meeting, “**Keep coming back—it works!**”

