

1/19/2020: 2 Epiphany 2020

Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts bear witness to you, O God, and to the Anointed One, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Why are you sitting here in church this morning?

What possibly possessed you to climb out of your warm bed on a dim, cold and quiet Sunday morning and come to church ... again?!

Christmas is over. The tree is down, the ornaments put away, even the pine needles have pretty much worked themselves out of the carpet by now. There is no big liturgical holiday scheduled for this Sunday. And yet, there you sit.

The weather is certainly not good this weekend and some probably stayed home as a result.

So, what are you looking for today?

These questions need to be answered. Not for me, but for Jesus and yourself.

We are a destination driven society. We need reasons to do what we do. I remember when I was young, we would all clamor into the car on a Sunday afternoon and go for a drive. As far as us kids knew, we weren't going anywhere specific; just for a drive. We did not have cell phones, DVD players, or laptops. We could bring books if we wanted to, or just look at the scenery. How many of you also played, "I spy" as you drove along? As I told Jan last week, my Dad would often just pull up to a friend or relative's house, unannounced, and

when they came to the door, there would be our entire family standing there ready to be invited in. Honestly drove me crazy.

This is not something we would even think of doing today. First of all, most of us are too busy and have too many plans to take a two-hour joy ride on a Sunday or any day for that matter. Gas is not cheap and if we stop announced, our prospective hosts may just say they have other plans and close the door.

We need reasons and plans for what we do.

Even our business cards, if we have one, lists our address, cellphone and home phone numbers and email address. Except for here at church, my cellphone is attached to my right hip. It sits next to the bed at night just in case there is an emergency. We have a plan for everything.

So again, why are you here this morning and what are you looking for?

I do believe that in all of the business of our lives, people truly do have a deep hunger for spiritual renewal. Not all recognize they are even searching for something more, to add to their lives. But we know that we need something. I don't jump to the conclusion that this is the reason that you are here today. I know that some of you are here because it is what you have always done; it is what we are **supposed to do** on Sunday mornings. It was not that way for me as I grew up. We did not go to church regularly when I was young. Attendance became much more regular when we moved to Michigan Center and my brother, sisters, and I started the Catholic school at Our Lady of Fatima. I like many others in the 60's and 70's, searched for spiritual meaning. Guitar masses were a thing then as we shifted from Latin to English. I was a little too young to be a hippie, but I wore out one 'Jesus Christ

Superstar' album, listening to it over and over again. I still have a copy of the rock opera, 'Truth of Truths' which never was as popular but still was a venue of spirituality for me. I was searching.

Even today, we have various forms of the Benedictine movement, walking a labyrinth, Centering Prayer, the Daily Office with Morning, Noonday, Evening prayers and Compline. If one is searching for God, there are numerous ways to try and get to that Holy place.

In our Gospel reading this morning, we again are told of John the Baptist's witness and proclamation of Jesus as Messiah. John explains in great detail that he is but the witness to someone much greater than he. John had many followers. It was important that his followers knew that he was not the long-awaited savior but it was Jesus who was the real deal. John had witnessed the Holy Spirit coming down to Jesus and staying with him. John testifies that Jesus **is** the Son of God.

After baptizing Jesus, John again sees Him the following day. He proclaims that Jesus is the Lamb of God. This is such a powerful witness that two of his disciples leave to follow Jesus. Jesus does not say a lot this morning, but what he does say is powerful. Remember the old commercials, 'When E.F. Hutton speaks everyone stops what they are doing and turns to listen'. When Jesus speaks, we need to listen.

I love the interaction between Jesus and the two disciples, one of whom is Andrew. Jesus sees them and says, "What are you looking for?" or in other words, "What do you want?". They respond, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Maybe there is some deeper meaning to this question, but it is also likely that the two disciples may simply have thought that this rabbi may have been too busy for questions, or teaching, right then. They wanted to know where

they could find him later on. Instead, Jesus issues the invitation to Come and See. We, also, have been invited to come and see.

I try to find a story that tells us the gospel message in a different way. I actually had a letter on my desk, from the Covenant House, which is a National organization that provides shelter for homeless teenagers. There is a Covenant House in Detroit as well as Grand Rapids. This story really fit for me.

“It was just after dark, and I had gathered with the kids and staff at one of the shelters. We formed a circle to mark the night together in prayer and thanksgiving for one another and the gift of God’s love in the world. Two of our faith community volunteers were playing guitar and singing Silent Night as a prelude to our services...when a shadow appeared outside the window, and lingered.

The lighting was poor and it was hard to see who was there. The figure was hooded and hunched over. He stood there, looking in, for more than ten minutes. I left our circle, walked past the manger and the Christmas tree, and went out the front door to see who was standing there. As I approached, I could tell it as a boy, maybe 16 or 17 years old. He had dark circles under his eyes and looked exhausted. “Hi there”, I said and offered a handshake. “I’m Kevin, what’s your name?” “Jeremiah” His smile was forced but he was trying.

“Want to come inside Jeremiah?” I asked. He hesitated, not making eye contact, just gently shaking his head back and forth. “Nah, I am alright. I’m fine right here,” he said tentatively.

“Well, you don’t look alright. You look tired. Come inside—we have some hot chocolate and Christmas cookies.” I offered. But he didn’t move. In my book, something has to be really

wrong to turn down cookies and hot chocolate on Christmas Eve. “Look, they’re right there,” and I pointed inside to the table with Christmas goodies. “Come in from the dark and take a load off.”

“How much do you charge?” he asked, his face filled with skepticism. “I only have 26.00 dollars on me and I need it. I have to find a place to stay and something to eat, and I need my money.”

“We don’t charge anything, Jeremiah. Come inside Covenant House with me, okay?” I turned to walk inside, trusting he’d follow, and he did, but slowly. I held the door for him as we entered, and we could hear the chorus singing the refrain of Silent Night. The music stopped Jeremiah in his tracks. “My momma used to sing that song on Christmas.” He appeared lost in the memory.

“Where is your mom, Jeremiah?” And he took out his wallet and unfolded a faded, creased Polaroid of a young woman with two small children and a mall Santa in front of a cardboard chimney.

“That’s me”, he said, pointing to the other toddler, “and that’s Momma.” “She died. She had breast cancer, 6 years ago.” He said it, matter-of-factly, as if he’d said it 100 times before. But something in the way he squinted his eyes betrayed the pain that his words did not.

“How about Ty?” I asked. “We went into foster care and got split up. He lives in a group house somewhere. I haven’t seen him for a while.” “Where have you been staying?” I asked. But he had stopped listening to me. Jeremiah’s gaze was fixed on the circle of kid’s, donors, and staff singing Christmas hymns. He bowed his head and started to shake a bit. His voice broke. “I got nobody mister. It’s Christmas and I got nobody.” His eyes had filled, and tears

were starting to spill down his cheeks. I asked Jeremiah if he wanted something to eat or whether he needed to rest, but he was intent on the circle and its music.

Then Father Placid, our chaplain invited us into the circle by saying, "Let's gather together and make room for everyone in our circle." We sang, we read prayers, and offered one another a sign of peace. Jeremiah took my hand and for the first time made eye contact. "I have nowhere to be right now", he said. "Nowhere, I don't belong in the world."

"Yes, you do Jeremiah, right here," I replied. "Peace son." "Peace", he whispered".

I am sure that Jeremiah may not have known what he wanted or needed that night. Kevin was able to be Jesus to Jeremiah, in those moments, inviting him to Come and See.

Many times, in life, we don't know where we are going. We follow Jesus as best we can, yet we get lost. We wander off the straight and narrow way; sometimes due to life's circumstances, and yes, sometimes on purpose. We search for Jesus in the world. Over and over again, Jesus has to stop, turn around, and ask us, "What are you looking for?" And over and over again, we ask Jesus, "How can we find you Lord?". And his answer to us is always, "Come and see."

And just as Kevin did for Jeremiah, we, in turn, extend the same invitation to others.

Amen