

Sermon – Second Sunday after the Epiphany

John 1:29-42

Last Thursday I went to the Metropolitan Opera for only the second time since I've been living in New York City. I went to see the opera Wozzeck, mainly because the set production was by William Kentridge, one of my favorite artists.

To get to Lincoln Center I took the C train. It is a lottery which version of the C train you get – the newer cars or the old relics from the 1960s. I was unfortunate enough to get the latter, meaning I was in for a rough ride. You are almost assured that you will get whiplash from the violent, screeching stops at each station.

Rather than dwell on the substandard nature of the old cars I tried to distract myself. So I started reading the subway car ads. I noticed on the wall a sign for a new dating app called Hinge. It had a furry little icon with eyes and the bi-line "The dating app designed to be deleted."

I first wondered why it would be designed to be deleted, and then I wondered just how many dating apps the market could actually sustain. Dating in this new technological age is certainly very different from when I was much younger. Where once you just had to present yourself in a pleasant way and wait for your heart to tell you "this is the one," now you have to complete a questionnaire, write a witty biography, post it along with a selection of photos that show one's self in the best light, and then sit back and wait for what you hope will be a lot of responses. Then you get to select the ones you want to engage with. And on it goes. The anonymous algorithm has replaced the matchmaker.

If you are fortunate enough to get a response that seems genuine you start the back and forth messaging that if all goes well might end in a date. It is a lot of work let me tell you! If you do get a date it is then that truth comes into its own. You get to see if the live person (a) looks anything remotely like their photo, and (b) seems to act in a way that resembles their bio and texts. If things progress a little you might even get to ask the perennial dating question, "What are you looking for?"

The question "What are you looking for?" is potentially loaded with heavy expectation for the answer one gives might spell the end of the date. So one answers in an often-opaque way and possibly even by asking the same question of the other person. This little dance around expectations is like the mating rituals of birds.

To be successful human relationships must be built on trust and mutual understanding. Many a relationship has failed because this fundamental understanding of each other's expectations was not explored.

So what are we to make of Jesus asking this same question, “What are you looking for?” When Jesus asked Andrew and the other disciple this question he probably wasn’t looking for a date. He was though looking for a relationship.

Jesus had just been baptized the day before by John and the next day John was standing with Andrew and the other disciple shooting the breeze, when Jesus approached them. We don’t hear that Jesus came up to them and thanked John for baptizing him. We don’t hear him say whether he enjoyed the ritual or not, or the dove landing on him. There was nothing like that. Rather John reverently reveals Jesus to the two disciples calling him rather majestically the ‘Lamb of God.’

Jesus had begun his journey to Calvary and was looking for companionship. Jesus was very much a communitarian and desired his own crew to be witnesses to his incredible life. John knew that he had fulfilled his birth destiny and was now time to recede to the background so Jesus life and ministry could fully blossom.

We are told that Andrew and the other disciple started to follow Jesus when he was revealed to them by John. The transition of these disciples from John to Jesus is marked with a degree of humility and sacrifice. The humility of Andrew allowed him to be receptive to God’s grace as embodied in the person Jesus. Sacrifice meant giving up their former lives to follow the Messiah, the Lamb of God.

Jesus sensed their presence when they started to follow him. They didn’t trail from a distance but must have been close to him for he stopped and turned to them and asked them, “What are you looking for?” They didn’t answer his question, opting to ask their own question, “Where are you staying.” This question implied that they wanted to be with him for a while and not just for a few short minutes along the road.

On hearing their question, Jesus answered with, “Come and See,” an invitation to come and join him where he was residing. They took up the invitation and followed Jesus and stayed with him for the afternoon. Andrew was transformed by the experience and recognized in Jesus that he indeed was the long-promised Messiah. Imagine his excitement. He became so excited and full of energy that we ran back to his home to tell his brother Simon that he had found the Messiah. What wonderment they must have experienced!

We can only wish for such a response to the dating question of “What are you looking for?” Jesus life embodied exactly what he proclaimed, whereas there is often a mismatch between what we embody and what we proclaim. Our human response may not be as exacting as Jesus’ was, but the psalmist who wrote Psalm 40 does illustrate for us what it means to live in faith with a high degree of integrity.

“I love to do your will, O my God; your law is deep in my heart.”

I proclaimed righteousness to the great congregation; behold, I did not restrain my lips; and that O Lord you know.

Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance; I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the great congregation.”

St Augustine said in his commentary on this psalm, “The lips must proclaim what is in the heart; this is the injunction against fear. But the heart must have within it what the lips say; this is the injunction against insincerity.”

The matching of humility, integrity and sacrifice that is required of us as we set out and follow Jesus is not found in a lot of people. One person I think does exhibit each of these essential Christian virtues is Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. who we remember tomorrow. Dr King lived a life of integrity, which is why so many people set out to follow him. Dr King lived a life of humility, which is why he moved from a relatively comfortable life up north to return to life in the deeply segregated city of Montgomery, Alabama. Dr King lived a life of sacrifice, which is why he went to jail numerous times defending his non-violent means of social change. Ultimately he became a literal sacrifice when he was cowardly gunned down some 52 years ago.

Dr King may have asked those that followed him, “What are you looking for?” He may also have issued the same invitation Jesus issued, “Come and see.” Many answered his call from all over the country arriving to the common cause with varying degrees of integrity, humility and sacrifice. Many were drawn to his philosophy of non-violent protest as a means of change that he learnt from Mahatma Gandhi. Many were drawn by his powerful sermons and speeches. Many were still drawn to his leadership. Many suffered beatings, some were killed and many more locked arms in protest after protest. His death ultimately brought about the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Act which helped bring equality to the lives of minority Americans.

When we follow Jesus, we too have answered his invitation to, “Come and See.” When we encounter those people who are nervous about crossing the threshold of church to find Jesus, we might ask the question “What are you looking for?” Then we too issue the invitation, “Come and see.”

We invite everyone to come and see the body of Christ, acting in the world through those he has called to the supper of the Lamb. We invite them to come and see our worship of God each Sunday and Wednesday, because it is the right thing to do to thank God for sending Jesus to walk amongst our forebears and give witness to the character of God. We invite all to be a part of this community of faith that seeks to love and serve the Lord with hearts of humility, love and service. We invite people to come and see and learn about Jesus as we all explore the question Jesus asked, “What are you looking for?”

If we are not asking this question in our own lives we might ponder why that is. Jesus always stands before us asking us to “Come and see” the way he is being made manifest in this

community, in our families and in our work places each day. Offer this invitation to others, so they too may come to know Jesus Christ.

Amen