

Scripture:

Psalm 40

John 1:29-51

“God forges relationships...drawing people together.”

God can do whatever it is God wants to do --- all by Himself.

In a real sense ---- God needs very little from us in order to accomplish all that it is that God wants to accomplish.

And yet --- over and over and over again ----- God forges relationships --- and chooses human beings to be involved in His great plan.

If He wanted to God could simply sit on his throne in the heavenly places --- and move us around like little pawns --- positioning things --- people --- places --- events --- as well as their timing ---- without any input or influence from us.

But thankfully He doesn't.

Instead --- God chooses relationships ---- He brings people together --- and draws us into Himself and forges relationships.

The relationship of us with Him.

The relationship of Him with us.

The relationships of us with each other in His name.

Relationships of --- family --- friends ---- communities ---- communities of faith.

God is a God of relationships.

He is not distant --- and standoff ish --- instead He is intimate and near.

So much so that He even invites us into His great plan for His creation.

He equips and involves us.

In a sense we are His instruments --- agents ----- and partners in His great plan for His creation.

God wants us to be close to Him ---- and be a part of all that He desires to happen --- so much so that He doesn't wait for us to figure things out ---- instead He comes to us and calls us.

And it is always God who takes the first step --- our relationship with Him has at its roots --- divine initiative.

We don't seek and search and suddenly find God --- even if it may sometimes feel this way.

In truth it is God who seeks and searches.

Saint Augustine of Hippo --- the great 5th century theologian and early church father----- said ---- “We could not even have begun to seek for God unless God had already found us.”

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When we hunger and thirst for God it's not as though we suddenly find Him ----- it's that we discover that He is already there --- already waiting for us to return to Him.

As Will Barclay --- 20th century Scottish theologian said ----- “When we go to God we do not go to one who hides Himself and keeps us at a distance; we go to one who stands waiting for us --- and who even takes the initiative by coming to meet us on the road.”

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And of course ---- this is precisely how we find Jesus in John's gospel today --- coming out to meet John --- and his 2 disciples on the road.

Picking it up at verse 35 from John's gospel today.

“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?””

“Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?””

Or as the NRSV translates Jesus' words ---- “What are you looking for?”

“What are you looking for?”

Perhaps the most fundamental question in life -- is the one Jesus asks these people ---- “What are you looking for?”

And just as it is today --- it was a pressing question.

Were these men legalists ---- looking at minute details about the Law --- hoping Jesus might be able to shed some light on matters and help them out in their intellectual understanding and acumen ---- like the Scribes and Pharisees?

Or were they more like the Sadducees --- seeking power and prestige --- wanting to look good and occupy positions of honour?

Or were they Zealots ---- looking for a political figure and military commander who would destroy the Romans and rule in power and might --- establishing his reign by authority and even bloodshed if necessary?

Or ----- were they more humble men of prayer and patience ---- authentically seeking God's will ---- like the ---- “quiet of the land” ---- referred to in Psalm 35?

Or --- were they a bit more genuine and true ---- simply seeking a little light on their paths and in their lives ---- looking for the love and forgiveness of God?

Whatever the case ---- we can all benefit from asking ourselves questions like ---- “What am I looking for?” --- from time to time.

“What are we looking for in life?”

“What are you looking for in life?”

“What do we actually want in life?”

“What’s our aim ----- what’s our goal in life?”

If we are truly honest with ourselves ----- what in the depths of our hearts are we really trying to get out of life --- what are we hoping for?

These type of questions are one’s that Jesus holds before us --- inviting us to lead authentic lives ---- in deep and close relationship with God.

So what are we looking for in life?

Security?

Are we trying to reach a place that is safe?

A place where we have enough money to meet the needs of life as well as put some aside for emergencies --- and then retirement.

Is security our goal?

Are we seeking and working for --- and focused on material security ---- trying to eliminate worry --- and even enjoy life a bit?

In part yes.

And of course a bit of a concern with security isn’t outright wrong --- most -- if not all of us do this ---- a lot even perhaps if we stop to think about it.

But if we really stop to think about it --- it’s a pretty low thing to aim for and hold on to as so important --- it’s not wrong --- but it’s too low.

It's an inadequate thing to direct all of our energies to ---- because at any moment a wide variety of things could happen --- that could change everything.

No matter how much we actually have --- it can very easily all disappear in an instant ----- identity theft ---- market collapse ---- perhaps we suddenly find ourselves in the grips of any number of addictions ---- no matter how much we have --- all of our material resources could very easily become totally depleted --- that's just life.

Or what about those --- or that part within us that sometimes searches and builds a career --- and power ----- and prominence ----- and prestige --- that part that drives us to want to make a name for ourselves --- be somebody --- stand out a bit.

Put a little more favourably ---- what about that part of us ---- that drives us to want to exercise our gifts and talents --- the part of us that wants to succeed and be recognized in our field.

Again --- this is not really a bad thing --- or a wrong thing ---- but if we are only ever driven by wanting to advance ourselves and express ourselves and fulfill ourselves ---- it's a rather low thing to shoot for.

And of course a career needn't only ever be selfish --- a career can also be all about serving others and advancing a cause that lifts others up ---- in and of itself a great career as a life goal needn't be a bad thing.

But again it still is a pretty low aim ---- because it's limited by the horizons of the world --- it's limited by the here and now --- worldly and material things --- secondary things.

And then there are those who are searching for something else.

Peace and meaning.

And ultimately --- a search for peace and meaning --- is a search for God.

And only Jesus can ever meet guide or direct us in this journey.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

Or ----

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What are you looking for?”

“What do you want?” --- “What are you looking for?”

The 2 people --- the 2 disciples of John --- walking with Jesus wanted to know where Jesus was staying.

In verse 28 after Jesus asks them --- “What do you want?” ---- they respond with ---- “Where are you staying?”

“Where are you staying?”

They don't just want a few minutes with Jesus in passing ---- bump into Him on the road ask a few questions and then each go on their way in different directions.

No ---- they want to go and spend some time with Jesus ----- “Where are you staying?” --- they ask.

They want to form a relationship with Him --- spend some time with Him --- -- go to where He is staying.

They want to hang out with Him for a while.

They want to eat --- drink --- talk --- ask some questions --- hang out --- build a relationship with Him ---- get to know Him.

Anyway you look at it ----- being a disciple of Jesus is all about being in relationship with Him.

It's not first and foremost about correct understanding of Him.

It's not first and foremost about getting all of His titles right --- or knowing all about exactly what He taught or did.

It's all about being in relationship with Him.

“Come and see.”

“Come and see.” ----- this is how Jesus replies to the “Where are you staying?” question.

He doesn't respond with ---- I'm at 156 Main Street --- He doesn't say I'm staying at a friends place over on 2nd street ---- “Come and see.” --- is what He says.

“Come and see.”

“Come with me and you will see.”

Relationship --- is what He stresses ----- not information.

“Come let's be together a while.”

God forges relationships ---- and God draws people together.

Relationship building and fostering is the way of Jesus Christ.

And further ----- Jesus is never just about a single experience --- event --- or moment.

Jesus is always and forever all about relationship ---- and relationships by their very nature are always on going--- back and forth ---- give and take.

Picking it up at verse 43 from John's gospel reading today ----- “The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.””

“Finding Philip...” ---- Jesus says --- “follow me”.

In other words --- Jesus went to Philip --- not Philip went to Jesus --- but Jesus found Philip.

Saint Augustine said ----- “We could not even have begun to seek for God unless God had already found us.”

And then 1500 years later Will Barclay says ---- “When we go to God we do not go to one who hides Himself and keeps us at a distance; we go to one who stands waiting for us --- and who even takes the initiative by coming to meet us on the road.”

Jesus found --- went to Philip ----- and then said to him --- “Follow me.”

“Follow me.”

Which is basically what He said the day before --- with John, Andrew, and a friend of theirs --- “Come --- and you will see.”

“Come and you will see.” ----- and then --- “Follow me.”

In other words ---- let’s be in relationship.

God brings people together.

Jesus makes Himself known through relationships --- He chooses people as a way to reveal and share Himself.

In our passage today ----- God chooses ---- John ----- Andrew ----- Simon --
- Philip ----- Nathanael ----- and decides to make Himself known through them.

Jesus decides to start relationships with these people ----- John ----- Andrew ----- Simon --- Philip ----- Nathanael --- as unlikely as they were.

And it is through them that Jesus will make known God’s will and build the kingdom of God.

Remember this is the very beginning of His ministry ---- and here is the very first thing Jesus does ----- finding a few people who start to walk and talk and spend time with Him.

And they embark on a profound journey of faith --- relationship --- and transformation --- that changed the world --- not just their lives but the whole world.

Our gospel reading today is all about just how Jesus chose to start His ministry.

Namely --- by finding a couple of people to build relationships with who would follow Him and His way and share the will of God for all to see.

And of course when Jesus calls John and his disciples to follow Him ----- yes they follow Him literally --- for 3 years as He walked the earth with them.

But Jesus was also talking about following Him after He was gone as well.

Following His example ---- doing what He was doing long after He is gone.

And if ever there was any doubt about the power and importance of relationship in the Christian life think about how Jesus empowers His followers before leaving them for the very last time ----- He breathes into them.

He breathes the Holy Spirit into them.

Only someone with whom you have had a deep and intimate relationship with --- would breathe into you.

Jesus leaves those to carry on following Him and His ways ---- by filling them with His very breath.

And of course in doing so ---- He is ensuring that the relationship they have formed and forged will remain.

In doing so He is assuring that these disciples of His will forever remain powerfully connected with God and His Spirit.

God forges relationships --- and brings people together.

And Jesus is the one who most clearly demonstrates this.

Our Christian discipleship is all about relationship.

Relationship with Christ --- not facts --- or knowledge ---- or experiences in the past --- but on going relationship with Him in the here and now.

Our identity and our conduct must be defined by the nature of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our identity and our conduct must be defined by our relationship with Jesus Christ.

We ought to want to go where He is staying ----- abide with and in Him --- spend some time with Him --- hang around together a while --- and then a while longer ---- and not just catch Him on the go and have a passing conversation --- or brief moment with Him.

God is all about lasting authentic --- real --- true --- sometimes difficult and challenging relationships.

There are few things as beautiful to God as Christians who actually take the time to build authentic --- real --- deep and meaningful relationships with Him and with each other.

Because that is precisely what He wants with each of us individually.

Authentic lasting --- real --- open ---- relationship.

Where the hurts and the joys --- the ups and the downs are shared --- and lived out together.

“Come and see --- come and follow.” --- Jesus says.

Come to where I am staying.

Come let's walk together.

Lets' grow together --- let's be in relationship with one another.

That's what Jesus is saying to these people.

Right at the very beginning of His ministry --- Jesus is found doing what is most important to Him --- building relationships.

In the very beginning of His ministry ---- the first thing Jesus does is find a few people who start to walk and talk and spend time with --- to build relationships with.

And that is still precisely what keeps His ministry alive and true and faithful today ---- authentic relationships.

One with another.

One and another with Him.

And one and another with God.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today ----- build relationships.

With God --- and with each other.

And so it continues --- relationship by relationship by relationship --- the kingdom of God grows.

“What are you looking for?” ----- Jesus asks.

“Come and see.” ----- He also says.

To God be the glory now and forever Amen.