

Sermon, Jan. 20, 2008, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany  
 Calvary Episcopal Church, Underhill, VT

Readings:

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

If you recall last week's gospel lesson (Matthew 3:13-17), Matthew gave us quite a different description of Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist, on the day of his baptism, than in the account we hear from the gospel of John (the apostle) this morning. According to Matthew, John (the Baptist) and Jesus had a bit of a disagreement about whom should baptize who, and Jesus prayed that John just get on with it, "*do it this way for now, John,*" that he could get on with his task, his public ministry. John did baptize Jesus, and everything changed. Suddenly it was apparent that Jesus *was* worthy of the celebrity status John was giving notice of; the voice of God and the appearance of the Holy Spirit made that even more clear.

Jesus has very little to say as the story unfolds today. John, on the other hand, can't wait to hail and exclaim the presence of "*The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,*" to everyone standing in or near the Jordan River that day as Jesus approached. One wonders if John's grandiose, flamboyant, and high-flying designation is how Jesus really wanted to be known, or did he prefer the simple, respectful "Rabbi" (teacher) that the two who became his first disciples christened him.

Many of us here this morning were in grade school or perhaps high school, or younger adults when John Glenn became the first American to be shot into outer space, the place once known as the "final frontier." He volunteered to be stuffed in to a tin can shaped like a cone, set on top of a rocket loaded with enough fuel and explosive power to defy the earth's gravity, and he dared them to "*light the candle.*" They did, he survived his high-flying ride, and he became one of the great American heroes, a US Senator, statesman, an outer-space pioneer, and a celebrity.

Some years ago I attended a political fundraiser where John Glenn was the guest speaker. Of course a dinner was offered before he and other politicians would climb up on "the stump" and make their grandiose, flamboyant, and high-flying speeches. Sen. Glenn was seated at a table on the floor of the hotel ballroom, rather than on a stage separate from the people, and I worked up the nerve to go to him and ask for his autograph.

As I approached him he turned my way, "*Sen. Glenn, may I have your autograph? It's for my Dad. He has cancer, and is not doing well. I know he would be thrilled to have it.*" I was expecting the usual quickly scrawled signature one gets from a celebrity, if they are lucky enough to get near them. But I got more than I was expecting. He reached behind himself and pulled an empty chair from a table next to his and invited me to sit down next to him as he wrote a note to Dad. Then he paused and asked me about Dad.

I went on to tell him I was in grade school when he blasted himself and this world into the era of space flight, and my entire school went to the auditorium and watched the

launch on television, speechless, only to cheer in mass when the Navy ships recovered him and his tin can from the ocean.

When mom went through the last of Dad's little treasures after his death, she sent me the program from that dinner with the Senator's note. She attached her own note to it: "*I thought you would like to have this note from your friend,*" it read. That's how this "larger than life figure" turned out to be once I looked beyond his fame. More like a friend, genuinely concerned about my ill father.

A few months later I reluctantly agreed to stand in a long, and winding line of folks that began outdoors on a cold January day, to enter the Governor of Virginia's mansion and shake hands with the new Governor on the day of his inauguration, his worldly anointment, if you will. That earlier dinner/fund raiser I just mentioned was for him. I was lured to stand in line and wait by the promise to visit a favorite "public house" after the shaking of the hand.

Once inside the mansion and only 2 persons away from shaking the hand, I spied Jacque Cousteau standing in the corner of that large foyer full of folks. I couldn't believe my eyes. "*Look, I said, that's Jacque Cousteau!*" as I stepped out of line and headed his way. My stepping out of line so close to the shiny new Governor raised the eyebrows of the folks I was with. They grabbed at me, but I slipped away headed over to shake Capt. Cousteau's hand. I took great pleasure in his discoveries and his TV specials "The Undersea World of Jacque Cousteau," which enlightened all of us about the biggest vessel of life on this earth, the sea, and I was determined to let him know I thought he was special.

Standing there, wearing a navy blue cable knit turtleneck sweater and looking as if he had just stepped off of his ship the "Calypso," I approached him wondering why in the world he was there in the first place. He nodded his head politely tolerating my heaping of praise and admiration, allowing me to pump his hand and arm as if he would spout water any moment. I offered my "*I don't think I missed any of your TV specials, I especially liked the one about sharks. I have one of your books, you were a strong influence in my love of science.*"

He bashfully and humbly thanked me and with his soft voice and French accent said, "*now, go tell all that to the new Governor, I'm making these sorts of appearances to raise government interest and money for my new oceanographic and teaching center I hope to build on the Chesapeake Bay of Virginia.*"

It was obvious he was uncomfortable with his celebrity status there, but he was willing to make his appearance, hoping folks would "*come and see,*" but not come and see him. He had a message he wanted us to know about our world and it was obvious he was willing to do whatever it took to teach us. He was a sailor, scientist, and teacher, and he built his headquarters for future study and discoveries on the Bay in Virginia.

I was taught at some earlier time in my life that it was impolite to ask someone, especially a person I just met, what "they do." *I am* curious about folks and what they do in their *worldly life* that distracts them so far away from their *spiritual* life. "*What do you do?*" is a helpful ice breaker" at parties and gatherings of people to ask. It helps the conversation take off.

But what one "does" on this earth is not really who they are. Who we are is first of all how God knows us, "*from within the womb he called me by name*" (Isaiah 49:1). The paths we chose take in our worldly life can make us forget that sometimes. Knowing

ourselves and others as God knows us may encourage us to ask “why do we do, what we do....and is what we do *really* what we want to do?” These are dangerous questions to ask and answer...honest answers to this sort of questions can cause some real changes in one’s life.

*“The next day, John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he called out, “Look, here is the Lamb of God” (John 1:36).*

John had convinced his two followers that Jesus was the One they really wanted to go with, and they turned from John to follow Jesus. But, Jesus seemed to have no idea why they would want to come to him, what his attraction was, or perhaps he wanted them to make sure they knew what they were about to do before they continued to follow. *“What are you looking for, he asked, what do you want from me” (vs 38).* Their naming Jesus “teacher” and wishing to know where he was staying for all intents and purposes revealed their desire to *learn from him* and *go on in their worldly journey* with him, but perhaps they still weren’t sure.

What they saw after they accepted Jesus’ invitation to *“Come and see”* (vs 39) must have been much more humble than they expected given the whole “lamb of God” celebrity status given to Jesus, yet the afternoon they spent with him must have been much more powerful than they expected, even more powerful than John’s grand pronouncement when they first saw Jesus.

There’s no indication in this scripture that Jesus had a place to stay, and at the time of day *“four o’clock in the afternoon”* (vs 39) when most folks were putting their day to rest, gathering what they needed to prepare their last meal of the day, making ready for the night: Andrew, went looking for his brother Simon to take him to see the *“Anointed”* One. Somehow this was more important, Peter dropped what ever he was doing, stepped out of what line he may have been long waiting in to go another’s way. Looking upon them with great love and compassion Jesus began to gather his chosen ones giving title to Simon as *“Cephas,”* (vs 42) Peter, “the rock.” Jesus was introducing a change in character in all who follow him. There was no time to waste.

Following Christ, doing things his way, going his way, will change one’s character. Some will claim those who pronounce a life in Christ are just being grandiose, flamboyant, and high-flying; I suppose it all depends on how one lives their life in Christ, we all hear a different call, we all profess it in our own way. Some are rocks, some are scattered leaves, some are doves, some are clanging bells and cymbals.

For certain, one would end up pretty lonely at a party or dinner event if they went from person to person asking, “what are you looking for from life, *come and see* what I know,” rather than “what do you do?” Most folks would politely excuse themselves and head for the hors d’oeuvre table. On the other hand one may have some very interesting conversations and make some mighty fine friends; friends who would stay near and make an effort to keep track of one forever; rock solid friendships..

Perhaps a better question to ask folks or even better yet, ask *ourselves* is this: “what do you do, and what do you want to do, what is your heart’s desire? Perhaps *what we do* is not leading us toward *what we really want to do* with our life.

That’s going to require we *“come and see,”* and risk a change in character, how we are known; require that one steps *out of the way* they thought they were going.