

Jazz, True Grit, and Come And See

Year A

Season of Epiphany

2nd Sunday After Epiphany

Sunday Between January 14 and January 20 Inclusive

January 16, 2011

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart, John 1:29-42](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Over Christmas I visited with long time friends and of course we talked about both the past and the present. The issue of faith and our place was central to who we were and are. In one sense our theme was still the U2 has a great song called "Still haven't found what I am looking for."

Then over the beginning weeks of January I gathered with another set of friends. Watched movies, ate well, and shared wine and conversation. We started with True Grit, a version of Calvin that only two Jewish boys could tell. Satisfying in sound, visuals, and dialogue. Under the images was that great old gospel - "Leaning on the everlasting arms." The movie ends, both with better conclusion than the first version, no nice happy ending, and a reprise of the Peggy Lee song, "Is that all there is?"

Through out all the conversations was the question of how to hear supreme love... to hear John Coltrane's "Love Supreme." The yearning for what Whitehead calls the Adventure of Ideas, harmony and intensity that moves, our feet, our bodies, into new realities. These songs reflect the perennial existential question of what makes humanity flourish? We come to the questions about what is worthy of us at different stages of our life. Context shapes our question of what is it that we want to define us.

I can imagine the early church asking is this all there is? We have been subjected and pushed to the edges. They asked in their time and place how will we flourish?

John gives us a nice image of the disciples asking Jesus "Where are you staying?" Location that sustains us through the dark night of the soul. Where is it that locates you, places you in the everlasting arms of Jesus. It is a question about where is your home that sustains and fills your heart. Geography defines our sense of who we are. And geography is about the places in our heart where we know we are flourishing.

One of our tensions in our modern society is how we are both an individual and a community. How do we flourish, make a difference as a person and through community is more of an issue today. What are the defining characteristics of a community that supports the flourishing of all? What is the nature of heroism. As Stanley Fish said about the new True Grit "heroism, of a physical kind, is displayed by almost everyone, "good" and "bad" alike, and the universe seems at best indifferent, and at worst hostile, to its exercise." It was easier when we knew that the bad guys were all bad.

The issue that True Grit lays out for us is the same issue that events like what happened in the USA last week lay out for us. As Fish puts it. "You must pay for everything in this world one way and another. There is nothing free with the exception of God's grace." These two sentences suggest a world in which everything comes around, if not sooner then later. The accounting is strict; nothing is free, except the grace of God. But free can bear two readings — distributed freely, just come and pick it up; or distributed in a way that exhibits no discernible pattern.

This attitude that there is no discernible pattern runs through all interactions. There is an sub consciousness nihilism in our age. It is seen in our approach to the environment. The environment is instrumental, that is a benefit to us and to us only. There is no sense of the intrinsic value of the other - we judge on usefulness to us. We define the natural world in terms of economic value, and even when we resist this, we speak of how things like flowers make us feel good. The external world is judge by its usefulness to us - the attitude of self referencing determines the meaning of the other. The dominate ethos of our time is, "Is it good for me?" The view is I create reality.

This is in tension with a sense of others trying to define us, gives signposts to tell us who we are. A sense of the group defining us. However, when there is a dominate ethos trying to make us fit it, our resistance can be self defeating, creating a hostile reality. We need to find ways of overcoming the tribal that does not fall into the rhetoric that government or an other are out to get us. This rhetoric creates a climate of violence or alienation. Thus an issue for our world is how to have both a sense of inclusion and a valuing of distinctiveness. A healthy society has shared values and a welcome of difference -honoring the strength and the gifts of the other, and to let there be a mutuality of influence.

As Fish says: 'while the Coens deprive us of the heroism others look for, they give us a better heroism in the person of Mattie, who maintains the confidence of her convictions even when the world continues to provide no support for them. She goes forward not because she has faith in a better worldly future — her last words to us are "Time just gets away from us" — but because she has faith in the righteousness of her path, a path that is sure (because it is not hers) despite the absence of external guideposts.'

To create this attitude we need to feel some beauty, goodness, love, truth which is symbolized in the image of the Lamb of God. This is a love poured out on us which is beyond our merit or deserving.

The gospel of John says that in-breaking is found in Jesus. This encounter is with the disciples of John the Baptist who wonder if the person the Baptize spoke of, is this Jesus. Can we trust is their question. The gospel story is a creative way of making the point John is making about the mission of Jesus. Follow the narrative, for we have John the Baptist say twice, to his disciples, here is the fulfillment of my mission. It takes a retelling because the listeners are comfortable where they are. Finally two make a tentative approach. They want to test - they apply the good old method of show me the money - what is called crude empiricism - meet my preconceived goals. Jesus rejects this approach, and offers another way of testing truth. He says "come and see."

The answer to our skepticism and John's that the way you test reality is not by some theory but by living. It takes time, it takes commitment. The narrative suggests that the witnesses to Jesus took time to come to faith and they did that by living in the faith.

The mission is living in the kingdom of heaven as a reality now, and the implication of that is to be worked out in everyday encounters. We learn what is needed by living in the situation.

It is in the character of God - who offers abundant Grace. This is a God who offers forgiveness and hope to every second of life. The power of God is one of vulnerability, a standing with those in need.

God is the one who is in the redeeming business, working towards the common good, where life flourishes. Now the meaning of flourishing is both easy to understand and easy to live for it is about quality as the mission and it cannot be quantified. To quantify as a goal will miss the quality. There are no signposts that tell us this is true other than living in and toward the way of wisdom and compassion.

Quality is an emerging reality. We learn from how we have flourished in the past and seek to enhance that flourishing in the present and the future. We judge the outcome by how we participate in making room for the flourishing of all life. Each particular life form will have its own flourishing, and what we do is create open space where this happens. Come and see is a pragmatism of creating a better reality now and seeking to make sure that good will continue. It is to move from self referencing to see how flourishing for all enhances each. We are a better me when all of life experiences a better reality.

This come and see defines a way a community is formed and lives. It is one of honoring the gifts of each. It is one of welcome.

Come and see is an invitation to live the fact we belong one to the other. Andrew returns and invites his brother Peter. This is an invitation approach- he is saying I learned about flourishing, why don't you come and see if this is for you? This is an invitation of try this, live this and if you find quality in this community for flourishing, then you too will see that come and see is how we grow. No fear, no you are wrong, no lists, only come and see.

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