

Sermon for Sunday, January 15, 2023
Second Sunday after Epiphany
“The One You’re Seeking Has Found You”
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Decorah, Iowa

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Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

What are you looking for? Jesus asks the guys who’re trailing behind him, peering at him, maybe trying to figure out if he’s for real. *What are you looking for?* As in, why are you here? What are you after? What do you need?

Jesus asks *us* the same question today. What are *you* looking for, really? Why are *you* here? We’re not always sure, don’t always have deep thoughts on the matter. Since we’re talking about Jesus, maybe the best way to answer that question is with another question. That’s what Jesus usually did.

Maybe to figure out what we’re looking for, it helps to ask, ***what’s saving your life these days?***

This question comes as a gift from author Barbara Brown Taylor. What’s saving your life today, here and now, getting you through this particular time? This question invites us to take a long, loving look at all the down to earth gifts of God that save us every day:

The ones that get you out of bed on yet another dreary morning;

The ones that bring delight, that reveal what matters to you, and so call forth your care and generosity;

The ones that break through the fog so you can see *there is more to me than the ways I consume, compete, and compare to others;*

The ones that make you laugh until the tears come.

What is saving your life? I had a head start on this question, so I’ll share my list first. I hope you’ll do the same at coffee hour, at home, on the phone with a loved one:

These days, God is saving my life through tea a friend gave me, yoga, and the Masters Swim team I just joined;

The smell of sweet potatoes roasting;

Thursday morning Bible Studies here - we ask each other such beautiful questions;

Ross Gay’s challenging book *Inciting Joy*;

Communion services at the nursing homes;

Padraig O’Touma’s voice cracking me open through his *Poetry Unbound* podcast;

Your voices raised in song and getting to join you in that singing;

AeroPress coffee, house plants, corn sack bags to warm me as I read before bed.

What is saving your life? Where do you experience God’s goodness and grace? I think *that’s* what we’re looking for - God’s ordinary grace that gets us through, that lights us up so that we can shine. It’s all around, all the time. So why don’t we recognize it? Why are we so often oblivious to these saving graces? What causes us to wander aimlessly, to seek what harms ourselves and creation, to miss the holy in the gifts and needs of others?

The Christian tradition describes all this as sin. That word sin doesn't refer to the bad things we do so much as it describes all that keeps us curved in on ourselves: everything that separates us from God and the rest of the world that prevents us from recognizing what we need, what others need from us, and the grace right before our eyes.

"What are you looking for?" Jesus asks the two men trailing behind him. I imagine that question stops them in their tracks. Yet, being that it's Jesus asking it, I trust they also feel seen and known and loved by the One who always looks at us with such gentleness and compassion. I imagine an even deeper longing arises in them, a longing for relationship.

"Where are you staying?" they ask him. Except the word they use can mean more than just *are you at Joe's house or at Pete's?* They use the Greek word *meno* which means stay, remain, dwell, abide. So, they're really asking, *where do you abide? Where do you dwell, Jesus?* We want to be there, wherever it is, we want to be with you. They can't fully answer the question of *what* they're after, but as Jesus gazes on them with love, they recognize *who* they've been seeking all along without even realizing it.

They, and we, need a Savior, the Messiah, the Lamb of God. The Savior says to those two seekers, says to us today, *Come and see, come and dwell with me.* You don't have to find what you need on your own. It isn't up to you to see clearly, to always be attentive, to have the right answers and the best questions. Just come and be with me, be part of the community around me, Jesus says.

You all come, come and feel my embrace of welcome and forgiveness. Experience the truth that I've taken on your sin, the sin of the world, so that nothing can separate you from me. Come and find your sin is released from you, that it's lost its power over you. Come and see how I open your eyes, your ears, your senses and bodies so that you can notice what's saving your life and tell others about it, so that you can recognize grace, receive grace, and reveal grace to others.

The two do come with Jesus, and in his presence they recognize and receive. We also hear they remain, they *meno* - abide, dwell, stay with him. From there they go and they tell others: we have found the Messiah. We've found the One we didn't even really know we needed. As they go, they find that telling others saves them again. Their experience of God's grace deepens as they recognize it and reveal it in the world by how they love, how they accompany those who are marginalized, how they forgive, how they shine as they follow Jesus' way of justice and joy. They go and tell others, "This Jesus community is saving my life. I want you to have this joy too. I want you in this community because I need you."

What are you looking for? What is saving your life? You've found *who* you're looking for, the One who has already found you.

God's grace is all around. Because of Jesus, you and I, all of us remain in this grace. In the Jesus community, we recognize, receive, and then reveal this grace.

Come and see. Go and tell.