

**Sermon, The Rev. Peggy Tuttle**

**January 20, 2008**

**Second Sunday after the Epiphany**

I spend a lot of time searching for God at work in the world about me. It's a journey I seem bound to which is probably why I was struck by the advertising during the holidays for a "journey necklace." It is a series of graduating diamonds dangling from a chain. Prices vary depending on the size of the stones and the quality of the chain. No, I didn't get one but that's another story.

It was the journey part of the necklace that fascinated me. Why graduated diamonds? Is our earlier life less value or is it just that the current time seems so big? I guess the answer is different for each of us or maybe just different on any given day

I am on a journey to be here with you. From Minnesota, where there is 3 or 4 feet of snow, temperatures ranging from sub-zero to highs of maybe 30? to here, on this island paradise where the temperature is almost always around 80 something. Last year alone, I traveled to 14 different cities, some twice, visiting 12 different states. Someone might ask, "why?" Why travel so much? Similar words are spoken by Jesus when he "... turned, saw them following, and said to them, 'What are you looking for?'" These are the first words Jesus speaks in the gospel according to John. The first words spoken to his disciples and they are the first words of significance. "What are you looking for?" This question will echo again and again; for over and over people will come to him, searching.

Religious people seem to believe life is about taking some kind of journey. There they are with John, in Bethany, beyond the Jordan. Many have come to John to

immerse themselves in the River Jordan and be baptized in his presence. They were a motley collection, but they have one thing in common: like us, they are on a journey, searching for some answers to the meaning of life, searching for God, searching for the meaning of our relationships to one another, the meaning of one's own existence. Yes, they, like us, are searching.

John preaches a baptism of repentance in order to receive forgiveness of sins, in order to be made acceptable. John preaches that new life is coming, coming in the future.

But unlike John and his contemporaries, we seem to have lost faith in the future. We are not seeking simply release from the evils that pursue us. We are seeking solutions. We are seeking our heart's deepest desires, now... And yet as Jesus asks of us, "What are you looking for?" the question initiates a terrible longing. It strips away our lesser goals and threatens our hard-won understanding, for we recognize that that for which we yearn we have not imagined.

Year after year we hear this passage read and church and we say to ourselves, "nothing has really changed." There were no apostles in the fourth gospel and there aren't any now, just disciples, learners; and we don't seem to be getting any smarter. Sure, something special happened 2,000 years ago; but that long ago event is just that, LONG, LONG ago and what I see around me now is not encouraging: We're done with the Cold War and back to the Hot Ones.

We are faced with more work than we can do, more bills than we can pay, more taxes than we can manage, and as we get older, more illness and gradually death. Sometimes it feels like much more than we can deal with. Life has become so ... DAILY. Is there really something to seek that we haven't tried before?

It is so easy to become discouraged with the monotony, weariness, and yes, even the pain of living. But we are in good company! Isaiah is certainly discouraged when he says in this morning's lesson, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing." Discouragement comes to Elijah, Moses, and yes, even Jesus.

I don't know, their struggles seem more worthy than mine. They are confronted with the wrath of kings. I am confronted by politicians. Their victories seem glorious. Mine seem rather ordinary. "I finally got Visa paid off now maybe I can tackle Master Card." Their words are immortalized; while you and I are often met with indifference when we try to tell people we are Christians. Their vision of God is clear whereas mine is often blurred. We get discouraged. Sometimes to the point where we are on the verge of accepting something less than that for which we seek.

Having waited a long time for the revelation that would transform his life, John the Baptist doesn't accept anything less. Not sure what it was to be until the day he sees a man walking towards him and he says, "Look. Look ... there is the Lamb of God."

"The Lamb of God." You and I know theologically, intellectually, abstractly what that phrase means. What's more we've seen lambs in stained glass windows. I know about sheep because I grew up on a farm where we had sheep and every spring we found the cutest little lambs among the ewes. But my children and grandchildren haven't had that same experience. For them, the only *lambness* they know about are the ones met in petting zoos. Hardly the image described in John's Gospel.

The story I am about to share with you comes from a seminary professor of mine. A Methodist minister friend had always puzzled over that phrase, "the Lamb of God"; and then one day as he was driving down a road in eastern Washington state, he was forced to a stop by a flock of sheep that were being herded across the road. Impulsively

he jumped out of his little Volkswagen bug, ran up to the shepherd, and asked: “What does ‘The Lamb of God’ mean to you?” And the shepherd explained it this way:

At lambing time in the Spring, two things occur: the flock is increased but always some ewes and some newborn lambs are lost. On one side of the field there may be a ewe whose newborn lamb has died at birth; on the other side of the field, a newborn lamb whose mother has died giving birth. On the one hand a ewe ready to nurture, with milk to give and no lamb to feed that she will accept; on the other, a living lamb in danger of starving because it is without a source of nourishment. So the shepherd takes the dead lamb, slits its throat, and pours its blood on the living lamb. Then he presents this living lamb to the living ewe as her own. Now the ewe recognizes the smell of the blood, will accept the living lamb as her own, and nourishes it with life-sustaining food. The dead lamb is the means by which the living one is given new life.

Hearing that story has given me a whole new understanding of what “Lamb of God” means. It is an Epiphany. I now understand what baptism means. Jesus comes as the one whose blood is shed so that “sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism,” we are “marked as Christ’s own for ever.”

Still, this journey that I’m on gets a bit confusing. It was just a few weeks ago that we were singing “Away in a manger” and looking at a baby Jesus. Today we are looking at Jesus as the one who dies for our sins. We are yanked from the crib to the cross and it doesn’t seem fair! I need more time to digest all of this. I need time to get my life in order, to unpack the meaning of a human God, Jesus, born in a manger. That in itself is difficult and now I am facing a Jesus who is known by John the Baptist to be the Lamb of God. Sometimes I get lost on this journey into Christendom. I need one of those GPS things but instead of it being Global Positioning System I need a God Please Save me

system. I guess you could say that's what God has done. He has sent us a GPS in the form of Jesus Christ. When asked today, "What are you looking for?" I've found it. I found Jesus. I found Jesus in the manger, at the temple, on the beach and in the streets.

My journey continues but my baggage is lighter for I, too, have seen the Lamb of God who takes away my sins, your sins, the sins of the world.