

John 1:29-42

January 15, '17

“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?”

**THERE IS AN AMAZING AND, I BELIEVE,
PROVIDENTIAL ALIGNMENT OF FOUR EVENTS
TODAY & THIS WEEK.**

**FIRST OF ALL, THIS LECTIONARY PASSAGE
WE’VE JUST READ FROM JOHN’S GOSPEL IS, IN
ESSENCE, THE EVANGELIST’S ACCOUNT OF THE
INAUGURATION OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.**

**SECONDLY, LATER THIS WEEK, WE WILL
EXPERIENCE THE INAUGURATION OF A NEW UNITED
STATES PRESIDENT.**

**THIRD - CORRESPONDING TO THAT
INAUGURATION, WE BID FAREWELL TO HIS
PREDECESSOR.**

FOURTH – AND FINALLY – THIS VERY DAY IS THE DAY FOR WHICH TOMORROW’S NATIONAL HOLIDAY IS SET ASIDE.

TODAY – JANUARY 15 – IS THE ACTUAL BIRTHDAY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

I FIND IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO CONNECT ALL FOUR OF THESE, WHILE PRIMARILY LOOKING TO SEE WHAT THIS PARTICULAR PASSAGE SAYS TO US INDIVIDUALLY & ALSO COLLECTIVELY AS A CHURCH.

LAST SUNDAY, WE LOOKED AT MATTHEW’S ACCOUNT OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

ASIDE FROM THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS, THAT ACCOUNT IS VERY SIMILAR TO WHAT WE FIND IN BOTH MARK & LUKE.

THIS IS JOHN’S ACCOUNT OF THE SAME EVENT AND IT’S DIFFERENT IN THAT IT ISN’T REALLY AN ACCOUNT OF THE EVENT ITSELF BUT RATHER JOHN’S *RECOLLECTION* OF THE EVENT.

LAST SUNDAY’S PASSAGE FROM MATTHEW INCLUDED THE FIRST WORDS OF JESUS IN HIS GOSPEL AND THIS WEEK WE FIND THE SAME THING IN THIS PASSAGE FROM JOHN.

THE VERY FIRST WORDS OF JESUS THAT JOHN RECORDS COME IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION – A QUESTION HE ASKS OF TWO WOULD-BE DISCIPLES – “*WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?*”

I WANT TO STOP HERE FOR A MINUTE & LOOK AT A COUPLE OF THINGS IN THIS PASSAGE THAT ARE QUITE FASCINATING.

**THESE TWO THINGS AREN'T REALLY PART OF
THE SERMON SO IF YOU WANT TO DRIFT AWAY FOR
A COUPLE MINUTES, NOW'S THE TIME.**

**FIRST OF ALL, I'M AMAZED AT THE INCREDIBLE
HUMILITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.**

THESE TWO YOUNG MEN ARE *HIS* FOLLOWERS.

THEY ARE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

THEY *ARE* – AND THEN SUDDENLY THEY *AREN'T!*

**THEY GO FROM BEING *HIS* DISCIPLES TO BEING
DISCIPLES OF *JESUS*.**

WHY?

**WHY DID THEY LEAVE JOHN THE BAPTIST &
FOLLOW JESUS?**

**ASTOUNDINGLY, BECAUSE JOHN TOLD THEM
TO!**

JOHN, THE GOSPEL WRITER, MAKES THIS AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE WHEN HE SAYS “*JOHN WAS STANDING WITH TWO OF HIS DISCIPLES. HE WATCHED JESUS WALK BY & EXCLAIMED, ‘LOOK, HERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD!’ THE TWO DISCIPLES HEARD HIM SAY THIS & THEY FOLLOWED JESUS.*”

YOU GET A MENTAL PICTURE OF THIS, DON'T YOU?

JESUS IS WALKING ONE WAY, WHILE JOHN & HIS TWO DISCIPLES ARE WALKING THE OTHER.

JOHN MAKES THIS DECLARATION & IMMEDIATELY THE TWO DISCIPLES DO A U-TURN AND HEAD BACK THE OTHER DIRECTION – NO LONGER FOLLOWING JOHN, BUT FOLLOWING JESUS INSTEAD.

**YOU CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SORRY FOR JOHN
THE BAPTIST.**

**THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY
DEMORALIZING FOR HIM!**

OR WOULD IT?

I DON'T THINK SO.

I THINK IT'S EXACTLY WHAT JOHN WANTED.

**SO OFTEN, WHEN WE SEE PICTURES OF JOHN
THE BAPTIST, WE SEE HIM POINTING AN INDEX
FINGER.**

**HE IS POINTING AWAY FROM HIMSELF AND
TOWARD JESUS.**

**HE KNEW WHY HE CAME – HE CAME TO PAVE
THE WAY FOR JESUS.**

**IT'S VERY MUCH LIKE THE ATTITUDE WE
TALKED ABOUT WITH ELIZABETH – NOT A JEALOUS**

BONE IN HER BODY AS SHE ALLOWED THE FOCUS TO BE ON MARY.

JOHN THE BAPTIST IS THE SAME.

HE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT PERSONAL POWER OR FAME OR ACCOLADES.

HIS PURPOSE WAS NOT TO BRING ATTENTION TO HIMSELF, BUT RATHER TO LEAD OTHERS TO JESUS.

WHAT A MARVELOUS MODEL OF DEEP HUMILITY!

A SECOND FASCINATING ASPECT OF THIS PASSAGE IS THE IDENTITY OF THOSE TWO DISCIPLES WHO LEFT JOHN THE BAPTIST TO FOLLOW JESUS.

WHO WERE THEY?

INTERESTINGLY, WE'RE TOLD WHO ONE OF THEM WAS – BUT ONLY ONE.

WE READ, “*ONE OF THE TWO WHO HEARD JOHN SPEAK AND FOLLOWED HIM WAS ANDREW, SIMON PETER’S BROTHER.*”

ONE OF THESE TWO DISCIPLES IS ANDREW.

THE IDENTITY OF THE OTHER IS NEVER MENTIONED – NOT SPECIFICALLY.

BUT I THINK THE WORDS WHICH IMMEDIATELY PRECEDE THE ONES WHICH IDENTIFY ANDREW GIVE US A PRETTY CLEAR CLUE AS TO WHO THAT OTHER DISCIPLE WAS.

JOHN – THE GOSPEL WRITER, NOT JOHN THE BAPTIST – SAYS, “*IT WAS ABOUT FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON.*”

NOW THAT SEEMS LIKE A RATHER STRANGE STATEMENT, DOESN’T IT?

**IF WE KNOW ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT JOHN,
THOUGH, WE MIGHT THINK HE WAS SAYING
SOMETHING SYMBOLICALLY.**

**HE'S SO ADEPT AT SAYING ONE THING BUT
MEANING ANOTHER OR USING METAPHORICAL
LANGUAGE.**

**HE'S ALREADY – EARLIER IN THIS FIRST
CHAPTER – MADE DISTINCTIONS ABOUT LIGHT &
DARKNESS.**

**ONE MIGHT THINK HE'S SAYING SOMETHING
LIKE THAT HERE.**

**YOU COULD UNDERSTAND IF HE SAID, “*IT WAS
6:00 A.M.*”**

**THAT WOULD INDICATE THAT LIGHT WAS
BEGINNING TO ENTER THE WORLD.**

OR, ON THE OTHER SIDE, IF HE SAID, “*IT WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT,*” YOU’D THINK HE WAS TALKING ABOUT THESE TWO DISCIPLES MEETING JESUS IN THE MIDST OF THE DARKNESS OF THEIR LIVES.

BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH “*IT WAS ABOUT FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON?!*”

I THINK WHAT JOHN MEANS WHEN HE SAYS, “*IT WAS ABOUT FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON*” IS THAT IT WAS ABOUT FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON!

THE REASON THAT’S SIGNIFICANT IS BECAUSE I THINK, WITH THAT STATEMENT, HE’S GIVING US THE IDENTITY OF THE OTHER DISCIPLE!

**WHO WOULD REMEMBER – OR CARE – WHAT
TIME IT WAS OTHER THAN SOMEONE WHO HAD
ACTUALLY EXPERIENCED IT?**

**AND WHY WOULD HE REMEMBER SO CLEARLY
THAT *IT WAS ABOUT FOUR O’CLOCK IN THE
AFTERNOON?***

**I THINK JOHN IS TELLING US THAT HE WAS
THAT OTHER DISCIPLE & I THINK HE’S TELLING US
THAT THE INSTANT HE FIRST MET JESUS WAS AN
UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT OF HIS LIFE – A
MOMENT THAT HE WOULD NEVER FORGET – AN
EXPERIENCE THAT WOULD CHANGE HIM FOREVER.
SO TOO WITH US.**

**WHEN WE HAVE HAD AN ENCOUNTER WITH
JESUS CHRIST, WE ARE FOREVER CHANGED IN THE**

**WAY WE LOOK AT LIFE, THE WAY WE LOOK AT THE
WORLD & THE WAY WE LOOK AT OTHER PEOPLE.**

**OKAY – SO IF YOU DRIFTED OFF, NOW’S THE
TIME TO COME BACK.**

**GO BACK TO THOSE FIRST WORDS OF JESUS IN
JOHN’S GOSPEL – A QUESTION HE ASKS OF THESE
TWO DISCIPLES.**

“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?”

**IT’S A QUESTION THAT CAN BE ASKED IN ANY
NUMBER OF SETTINGS.**

**YOU WANDER AROUND THE HOUSE, LOOKING
ON TABLES AND UNDER CUSHIONS.**

**YOUR SPOUSE ASKS, *“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING
FOR?”***

“I’M LOOKING FOR MY CAR KEYS.”

**YOU SCAN THE SHELVES IN A GROCERY STORE
& A CLERK ASKS, “*WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?*”**

“I’M LOOKING FOR CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP.”

**WHEN JESUS LOOKS IN THE EYES OF THOSE
TWO DISCIPLES, HE SEES A SEARCHING & A
LONGING FOR SOMETHING FAR MORE PROFOUND
THAN A SET OF CAR KEYS OR A CAN OF CHICKEN
NOODLE SOUP.**

**WITH THESE WORDS - THE VERY FIRST WORDS
HE SPEAKS IN JOHN’S GOSPEL – JESUS ASKS A
QUESTION THAT CUTS TO THE VERY HEART & SOUL
OF LIFE ITSELF.**

**IT’S A QUESTION THAT EVERY ONE OF US MUST
ASK OURSELVES.**

***“WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR? WHAT DO I REALLY
WANT OUT OF LIFE?”***

I THINK HERE’S WHERE WE BEGIN TO MAKE A CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE FOUR DIVINELY-ALIGNED EVENTS – THIS LECTIONARY PASSAGE OF THE INAUGURATION OF JESUS, THE CONCLUSION OF ONE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION & THE INAUGURATION OF HIS SUCCESSOR & OUR OBSERVANCE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY.

LET’S START WITH THE LAST ONE.

WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ASKED THAT QUESTION OF HIMSELF – “*WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?*” - HE GAVE AN ANSWER THAT, I BELIEVE, ALL OF US WOULD LIKE TO GIVE.

THE DIFFERENCE, PERHAPS, IS THAT HE FULLY LIVED OUT THAT ANSWER.

HE SAID, “*I’M LOOKING FOR SOMETHING THAT WILL GIVE MY LIFE MEANING.*”

I'M LOOKING FOR A WAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

***I'M LOOKING FOR A WAY TO LIVE FEARLESSLY IN
A WORLD THAT CONSTANTLY TELLS ME I'M SUPPOSED
TO BE AFRAID.”***

**DR. KING FULLY EMBRACED THE WORDS OF THE
GREAT CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIAN & MARTYR,
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, WHO SAID, “*WHEN CHRIST
CALLS A MAN, HE BIDS HIM COME & DIE.*”**

**ISN'T THAT THE ANSWER ALL OF US WOULD
LOVE TO BE ABLE TO SAY WE WERE WILLING TO
OFFER WHEN ASKED, “*WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING
FOR?*”**

**MARTIN LUTHER KING TRULY BELIEVED IT
WHEN HE SAID, “*THE ARC OF THE MORAL UNIVERSE
IS LONG BUT IT BENDS TOWARD JUSTICE.*”**

**HE KNEW THAT, NO MATTER HOW LONG IT
TOOK, JUSTICE – IN THE END – WOULD PREVAIL.**

**HE KNEW THERE WOULD BE SETBACKS ALONG
THE WAY, BUT HE WOULDN'T LET THOSE SETBACKS
DETER HIM.**

IN OUR TIME, THE SAME HOLDS TRUE.

**WE MAY SEE SETBACKS BUT EVEN THOUGH THE
ARC OF THE MORAL UNIVERSE IS LONG, IT ALWAYS,
ALWAYS BENDS TOWARD JUSTICE.**

**THIS PASSAGE & OUR OBSERVANCE OF MARTIN
LUTHER KING DAY ALIGN PERFECTLY.**

**AND THAT LEADS US TO THE THIRD DIVINELY-
ALIGNED EVENT OF THIS PARTICULAR WEEK -THE
END OF A PRESIDENCY.**

**POLITICS ASIDE, I THINK IT'S PRETTY CLEAR
THAT FOR THE PAST EIGHT YEARS – WHATEVER**

**DIFFERENCES ANYONE MAY HAVE HAD WITH OUR
CURRENT PRESIDENT – WE HAVE SEEN SOMEONE IN
THE HIGHEST OFFICE IN THE LAND FILL IT WITH
GRACE, HONESTY, HUMILITY, INTEGRITY &
PROFOUND DIGNITY.**

**HE WAS A PERSON OUR CHILDREN &
GRANDCHILDREN COULD LOOK UP TO & ADMIRE.**

**AS PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST – EVEN
THOUGH POLITICAL, SOCIAL & THEOLOGICAL
VIEWS MAY HAVE DIFFERED FROM HIS – WE CAN BE
THANKFUL FOR HIS RESPECTFULLY OPEN &
OUTSPOKEN COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST.**

**WE CAN BE THANKFUL FOR HIS UNWAVERING
DEDICATION TO AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF OUR
FAITH & AN OVERRIDING COMPONENT OF OUR
NATIONAL IDENTITY - THE MAGNIFICENT**

**DIVERSITY OF OUR COUNTRY THAT SETS US APART
FROM EVERYONE ELSE & MAKES THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA THE GREATEST NATION ON
EARTH.**

**AND NOW WE COME FULL CIRCLE - FROM THE
INAUGURATION OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO OUR
OBSERVANCE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY TO
THE CONCLUSION OF A PRESIDENCY AND, FINALLY
TO THE INAUGURATION OF HIS SUCCESSOR.**

**WE HOPE & PRAY FOR WHAT THE FUTURE
HOLDS FOR HIM & HIS ADMINISTRATION & HIS
LEADERSHIP.**

**WE HOPE & PRAY THAT, IN TERMS OF OUR
NATIONAL LIFE, HE IS, INDEED, THE CORRECT
ANSWER TO THE QUESTION “*WHAT ARE YOU
LOOKING FOR?*”**

**WHEN WE WERE ASKED IN NOVEMBER,
COLLECTIVELY – THROUGH OUR ELECTORAL
SYSTEM - THAT’S THE ANSWER WE GAVE.**

THIS IS THE INDIVIDUAL WE’RE LOOKING FOR.

THIS IS THE ONE WE HAVE CHOSEN TO LEAD US.

WE HOPE & PRAY THAT ALONG WITH

WHATEVER NEW & CREATIVE PLANS & PROGRAMS

HE IMPLEMENTS, HE WILL ALSO EMULATE MANY OF

THOSE SAME CHARACTERISTICS OF – NOT ONLY HIS

IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR – BUT SO MANY OTHERS

WHO HAVE HELD THAT OFFICE BEFORE HIM.

WE HOPE & PRAY THAT HE WILL LEAD WITH

GRACE, HUMILITY, HONESTY & INTEGRITY AND A

PROFOUND SENSE OF DIGNITY.

**WE HOPE AND PRAY THAT HE WILL BE
SOMEONE OUR CHILDREN & GRANDCHILDREN CAN
LOOK UP TO & ADMIRE.**

**HE HOPE & PRAY THAT HE WILL BE
RESPECTFULLY OPEN & OUTSPOKEN IN HIS
COMMITMENT TO JESUS CHRIST.**

**WE HOPE & PRAY THAT HE, TOO, – LIKE HIS
SUCCESSOR – WILL DISPLAY AN UNWAVERING
DEDICATION TO AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF OUR
FAITH & AN OVERRIDING COMPONENT OF OUR
NATIONAL IDENTITY - THE MAGNIFICENT
DIVERSITY OF OUR COUNTRY THAT SETS US APART
FROM EVERYONE ELSE & MAKES THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA THE GREATEST NATION ON
EARTH.**

**YES, THIS IS A DAY WHEN I FIND IT VIRTUALLY
IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE THOSE 4 EVENTS THAT
HAVE BEEN DIVINELY-ALIGNED FOR OUR
CONSIDERATION.**

**SOMETHING I DO EVERY YEAR AT THIS TIME IS
READ MARTIN LUTHER KING'S "*LETTER FROM A
BIRMINGHAM JAIL*" THAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE
MARGINS OF A NEWSPAPER IN 1963 FROM A
SOLITARY CONFINEMENT JAIL CELL IN
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA.**

**KING WROTE IT IN RESPONSE TO A LETTER
THAT HAD APPEARED IN THAT SAME NEWSPAPER &
WAS WRITTEN BY 8 CLERGYMEN OF THE CITY,
SPEAKING AGAINST KING'S CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES.**

I READ IT EVERY YEAR BECAUSE, MUCH LIKE THE LETTERS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL, KING WASN'T JUST WRITING TO ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE IN ONE PARTICULAR SITUATION, HE WAS WRITING TO ME AS A CLERGYMAN IN MY OWN TIME & PLACE.

HE CONCLUDES THAT LETTER WITH THESE WORDS: *“LET US ALL HOPE THAT THE DARK CLOUDS OF PREJUDICE WILL SOON PASS AWAY AND THE DEEP FOG OF MISUNDERSTANDING WILL BE LIFTED FROM OUR FEAR-DRENCHED COMMUNITIES, AND IN SOME NOT-TOO-DISTANT TOMORROW THE RADIANT STARS OF LOVE AND BROTHERHOOD & SISTERHOOD WILL SHINE OVER OUR GREAT NATION WITH ALL THEIR SCINTILLATING BEAUTY.”*

MAY THE ALIGNMENT OF THESE FOUR EVENTS FOR THIS WEEK SIGNAL AN ALIGNING OF THOSE

**RADIANT STARS OF LOVE & BROTHERHOOD &
SISTERHOOD.**

**MAY WE ALL – INDIVIDUALLY AND
COLLECTIVELY, AS A NATION AND AS A CHURCH,
DISCERN – AND TRULY FIND - WHAT WE'RE
LOOKING FOR. AMEN.**

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