2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 1.14.18
1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19/
1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20/John 1:35-42

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

For the past two months we’ve been on quite a trip as we’ve listened to the scriptures throughout Advent and Christmas. We have relived the world’s waiting for its savior. We commemorated the unique coming of God in our flesh. We’ve recaptured the message of the magi, the wise men, that God meant salvation in Jesus for everyone -- Gentile as well as Jew. And now, during the next five weeks before Lent, we will walk with Jesus as he begins his public ministry. This God-man who came for all of us begins to gather disciples.

It’s an extraordinary episode, this gospel we hear today -- very important not only for the original disciples but for each of us. It was such an important moment that the gospel writer even mentions the time of day that they encountered Jesus: it was about four in the afternoon. It places before us many questions: How did this ‘first-round draft’ of disciples take place? What was it about Jesus that appealed to them and made them want to “leave all things” and follow him unconditionally? What special attraction did they see in this itinerant preacher? How do you and I understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus today? How can you and I, as contemporary Americans who find evangelizing door to door embarrassing, demonstrate our enthusiasm about Jesus?

Finally, there’s the question Jesus himself asked the disciples-to-be: “What are you looking for?”

What am I looking for in following Jesus? What do I expect to happen? What promises do I hope to see fulfilled? What questions answered? We each have to answer that question and respond to Jesus personally: “What are you looking for?” I suppose that answer changes daily, depending on the circumstances of each of our lives. Like so many others, I look for inner peace, for happiness for myself and for the ones I love, for health in mind and body..... and for miracles, hoping that Jesus will do the impossible. And some of those miracles, I believe, are happening even now.

Tomorrow our nation celebrates a holiday in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For many of us this marks something that we are looking for, a sharing in the miracle of equality. King’s life, like the life of Jesus and all the prophets, was a life of transformation. He worked to overcome darkness with the light of truth and to change unjust situations into situations of goodness. He labored to bring about conversion by turning hatred into love and freedom. King’s journey led him down difficult roads: from a bus boycott in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, to prayer marches and youth rallies in Washington, D.C. From student sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina, to street demonstrations in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama.

Dr. King’s public demonstrations brought to light, through television and media coverage, the full extent of racial prejudice and hatred that existed in this country. Many of us are old enough to remember watching with heavy hearts as
our black brothers and sisters were being dragged through the streets, attacked by police dogs, controlled by the heavy pressure of water hoses and cattle prods. Wherever he went, Dr. King was able to mobilize people by the thousands to bring to public scrutiny the injustices that existed, using Gandhi’s practice of non-violent protest. In 1964 Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize for his dedication and efforts. His actions led Congress to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act, desegregating public accommodations, and the Voting Rights Act, enabling black voter registration to double and black officials to be elected.

Martin Luther King’s life ended when he went to Memphis, Tennessee, to help sanitation workers strike for civil rights and decent wages. His personal dream was brought to a cruel end by an assassin’s bullet on April 4, 1968 -- fifty years ago. But the blood that was shed planted the seeds of racial equality that have made his dream a reality. His blood and the blood of all who suffered in the civil rights movement mingled with the waters of oppression and prejudice to form the new wine of freedom.

We have a long way to go to fulfill this dream and to continue that miracle. Violence and prejudice against blacks and ethnic minorities is still prevalent in our country and in our world. The black community is still the victim of injustice in an economic system which needs ongoing conversion and restructuring. The national statistics for violent death among black males is still high. Even our president, in the most egregious ways, fails to grasp the subtle and not-so-hidden dangers of white privilege. Nonetheless, Dr. King’s example of faithful and courageous discipleship serves as a continuing witness to all who would follow the Lord. We can and will overcome! Love, King said, is the most durable power in the world.

If you’ve never been to the Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco near the Moscone Center, take some time with your family to enjoy that magnificent place. As you walk through the park that surrounds the performing arts center there, your ears will hear the splash of cascading waters from a beautiful monument.

That fountain is a memorial to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. It stands as one of the most compelling elements of the Yerba Buena Center. Underneath the waterfall visitors stroll leisurely and read excerpts from Dr. King’s many exhortations etched on glass walls. The excerpts from his speeches are printed in several languages. His words and the testimony of his life offer a challenge to all people of all races and all times. One quotation struck me as I visited the Gardens again with out-of-town guests during Thanksgiving week. It reads:

Love,
King said, is the most durable power in the world.
The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

The Gospel today calls us to heroic humility, so that a new generation can build on our accomplishments and achieve far more than ourselves; to strong confidence that the new will be a continuation of ourselves and a true blossoming of our efforts; to continuous hope and optimism that the least effort on our part will yield good fruit beyond our dreams; to the kind of loyalty it takes to transcend individualism and to sacrifice for a worthy cause. That’s what is entailed when we, like those first disciples, respond to Jesus’ invitation to “Come and see!” Jesus wants to show us a vision of God’s Kingdom – a dream that he calls us to help make come true. May our response always be: Speak, Lord! Your servant is listening.

John Kasper, OSFS

“Speak, LORD, for Your Servant Is Listening.”
1 Samuel 3:1-4:1