

Genesis 2:4b – 9, 15 ~ John 1:35-51

“I’ve Been Meaning to Ask... where are you from?”

1st of 4-part Series: “I’ve Been Meaning to Ask... a series for curiosity, courage, & connection”ⁱ

2nd Sunday after Pentecost ~ June 6, 2021 ~ Holy Communion

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Introduction to Scripture:

Curiosity runs rampant in the story you are about to hear. It’s mostly curiosity about Jesus. Who is this man? Although John the Baptist already knew Jesus as the Lamb of God, no one else does, yet. In this text, the disciples display for us a respectful and healthy curiosity. Notice how they ask questions only after Jesus gives them permission. They are eager to engage, but at the same time their curiosity is unintrusive.

Curiosity in this story is also contagious: Andrew passes it on to Simon. Philip passes it onto Nathanael, whose assumption and negative bias about anything or anyone from Nazareth, threatens to stop the flow dead in its tracks. And, we see how curiosity is a two-way street. Since Jesus had been curious enough about Nathanael to already know a core truth about him, when Nathanael heard this, his prejudice, or prejudgment about “someone from Nazareth” vanished quickly.ⁱⁱ If only ours did, the same.

I invite you now to “come and see” how curiosity moves in this reading of John 1, beginning at verse 35.

Communion Meditation:

Curiosity often gets a bad rap. Worst case: it can lead to fatalities as in, “Curiosity killed the cat.”

Or curiosity, short of lethal damage, simply leads to trouble, such as the tales and antics of that delightful storybook monkey, “Curious George.” Despite the best efforts of “the man in the yellow hat,” George’s curiosity leads him into all kinds of mischief.

The word is also used to describe strange and unusual phenomena, such as the moment when Alice went down the rabbit hole in the marvelous classic, *Alice in Wonderland*. As Lewis Carroll has so memorably written, “Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English); `now I’m opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!’ (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off).”

Today we begin a four-week sermon series titled “I’ve been meaning to ask... a series for curiosity, courage, and connection.” I have chosen this series, created by Sanctified Art, because I think it will lead us to the heart of questions we all are asking right about now, as we emerge from fifteen months of pandemic shutdown and isolation. Questions like: “How can we listen to one another?” We are out of practice talking, being with people beyond our immediate families. Just last week, Bob and I went out to dinner at restaurant: sat down at a table inside with a

couple of friends for the first time since the pandemic. An usual, yet wonderful experience. After about two and half hours of conversation, Bob remarked: "This feels strange but great: it's the first time I've had an extended in person conversation with anyone besides Laurie in over a year!" Poor guy.

How *do* we find connection after all these months? How do we create space for compassionate dialogue and for seeking the holy in one another? It seems as though on a national level, and on a local level as well, we've almost forgotten how to talk and listen to someone we don't know or don't agree with. Remember the old, common wisdom, when in conversation and you are unsure of their opinions on important topics: stick to the weather and each other's health. Those two topics were considered "safe" and "noncontroversial." But these days, given the politicization of climate change, and our conflicting views on health care policy in the USA, even those two topics are no longer on the table of neutral talking points.

The hope is that this series will help us consider and develop better ways to see each other as images of the divine, regardless of who we voted for or what media outlets we choose as our news source. By looking for and learning how to see the images of the divine in people who find hard to understand or get along with--our capacity for empathy and compassion will be strengthened. Christ can teach us how to access this spiritual power within. Today we will just dip our toe in the water of this series by focusing on curiosity and the power of asking unassuming questions. That's right: questions where we refuse to assume things about another person before we know them at all. Or even when we think we do know them. We can learn to ready ourselves to have our assumptions be disrupted.

For starters, our Genesis text reminds us that we are all shaped from the dust of the earth and the breath of God. The word human comes from "humus" which means soil; and the name Adam, in Hebrew means "dust from the ground," *Adama*. Yes, we could all be called "mud." God formed Adam *and* breathed life into Adam. However you may relate to this creation story of ours in Genesis 2, it tells the truth of our common humanity. We all come from the same source: we are *all* made of the same soil, the same dirt. As we are reminded when we commend a loved one at end of a funeral, and on every Ash Wednesday at the beginning of lent: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," and, "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." Yes, we are God-breathed dust, star dust, but dust all the same.

We believe this Genesis story was written in the 6th century BCE, addressed most likely addressed to exiles. It was an origin story written down for the Israelites who at the point were suffering under the oppression of Babylonian captivity, far from home. This story, in part, was written to assure them that their past had not been stripped away, and lost to them. With no sense of past, we begin to feel disposable and useless. Without grounding in our past, we are hindered from looking into the future with hope.

The question of where we are from is never a simple one to answer, even though on one level, at the DNA level we come from the same dirt. At the same time, everyone of us is absolutely unique: genetically and environmentally: the family or families in which we were

raised, the place or places, the culture or cultures in which we have lived and from which we have learned of life as we know it.

Look around this room: no two of us are the same at all. Even though we are all living in the Marshfield area, those of us in this sanctuary right now: we all look different. We think and act and talk, like no one else on this earth. We all have a different story. What is yours? Where is home for you? Where are you from? As we observed in our gospel text: healthy curiosity is not lethal, nor will it get you into trouble like “Curious George.” As a spiritual practice healthy curiosity can start conversations that lead to the formation of relationships that can break down stereotypes and the fears that indeed can become lethal, if unchecked or countered. As I mentioned at the top of this meditation: Healthy curiosity is consensual, contagious, and a two-way street. And it takes practice.

I am countering your assumption that only I would be speaking during this meditation, by giving you 60 seconds to turn ask a person sitting near you those two questions, “Where is home for you? Where are you from?” and listen to what they have to tell you. And then I will give everyone another 60 seconds to reverse the roles, and have the other person speak, and the first speaker, listen. If you are worshipping at home with another person, ask them. If you are worshipping by yourself, take these moments to think about your responses. And I encourage you to reach out to someone you know later today, and ask them, as well. Again, the two questions are: “Where is home for you? Where are you from?”

Truly, healthy curiosity can grow and grow our understanding of one another—taller than Alice’s telescoping body, and will neither inflict violence or trouble on either party. Rather, curiosity is a fundamental building block of the “Beloved Community” which Jesus came to show us. Let your holy curiosity loose this week—and see what Christ will reveal. Just say, “I’ve been meaning to ask... where are you from?”

ⁱ This sermon series idea was created by Sanctifiedart.org, Founding Creative Director, The Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity.

ⁱⁱBased on commentary in the sermon series planning guide, by Dr. Raj Nadella, Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA.