

Year A – Proper 17 “Got your Attention!”

How does God get your attention?

Bob Pyle, the Director of the NE Harbor Library and fire/police department volunteer, was handling traffic at an accident scene the other day. They had to close 3/198 from both directions and he was sending everyone back to Town Hill and over the Crooked Road. After repeating directions for half an hour he began to vary them, generating this exchange:

BOB S'trewth, this way is blocked by an accident, but there are alternatives. Whither goes't thou?

HE (pointing past the accident scene) Thither; even unto Bar Harbor.

BOB This way, woe attends. Go ye back unto Town Hill and bear right at the crest of the hill.

HE Forsooth. Thou art kind. We shall proceed forthwith.

His license plate was "Psalm".

The King James language lives and so does the Spirit of God who is still chuckling!

It took a burning bush for God to finally get Moses' attention. So much had happened to Moses. Sometime in the process of growing up in Pharaoh's court, he learned his own heritage and so when he saw

an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he intervened and killed the Egyptian. He had to leave Egypt in haste to avoid prosecution and certain death from the hands of the Pharaoh. And now, on his own, he settled in the land of Midian where he met Zipporah and they had a son Gershom. They lived with her family and Moses tended the flock of Jethro, Zipporah's father. Many years had gone by. One can only imagine Moses' reflections on his past and how he had been saved by his Mother only to kill another man and have to flee and leave his people.

But God did not give up on Moses or on his people and in today's story we hear that remarkable story of the bush that burned that was not consumed and when approached a voice spoke to Moses. He was finally in a place where he could hear and attend and even though he argues with the voice, a part of him knows that truth and life is before him. The name of the voice, I AM WHO I AM, can also be translated from the Hebrew, *I am becoming who I am becoming*. This God is one that is dynamic *Being* that works in and through humanity and, as Jesus will later show, all of creation. Subsequent verses tell of the long argument that Moses has with God before he finally relents. But he got his attention and the transformation of Moses into a leader of his people was underway.

I have to confess that my first thought after I heard of the earthquake in Washington, D.C. was – God is trying to get their attention! It's time to attend to the things that really matter and to begin to work together. In an earlier time we would have said just that, but, of course we're much smarter now – or are we?

Jesus gets the disciples attention in today's Gospel, too. They are glowing in the wonderful affirmation that Peter has just received about Jesus' being the Messiah of God when Jesus goes off the deep end and tells them that this is not going to lead where they think it will. He faces the surrender of his life before he is truly transformed through the resurrection. And then that famous saying: “*Whoever will save his life shall lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it. For what will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?*” . .

According to the Greek and the Hebrew understanding, the Psyche (soul) is that place in the human being where the material and eternal intersect. In Jesus' terms this is where earth and

heaven come together in us. This place of divine indwelling, intermixed with the material world of the body, is what God wants to “wake up” in each of us.

Some of us have been studying the Gospel of Thomas this summer. It is an enigmatic Gospel that, upon first reading, makes no sense. When the canon of what we now call “The Holy Bible” was put together, it was not included. Possibly because it does not have an obvious narrative but also because it is a very different kind of text – not one you can sit back and listen to in the way you can the other texts.

Instead, it is a series of Jesus’ sayings, designed to wake up your soul and begin the inner process of transformation into a whole human being. The emphasis throughout is on coming to an understanding of the unity that is inherent in the cosmos – seeing how duality is not two but actually one. It is out this perspective that so much of Jesus’ enigmatic teaching comes – Lose your life to save it; the first will be last, the last first. Anytime you see Jesus comparing opposites and pointing to something that is different from our usual understanding, He is pointing to the reality of Life and how we are invited to grow into complete human beings. In one of the Thomas sayings, Jesus says:

“Come into being as you pass away”. (Logion 42)

In other words, as we give up old understandings, ways of living our life as the culture would have us; As we refuse to cling to old ways of being, the being of God, where heaven and earth come together is manifest in us. “I AM BECOMING WHO I AM BECOMING” says the voice of God from the bush that is not consumed by its fire. We, too, are meant to become like that bush – on fire with the love and light of the living God.

So, what does it take for God to get your attention? What will it take to get you started down the path of transformation, not for yourself but for the world and community in which you serve. And what does it take to keep us engaged in that endeavor, to be continually renewed in the journey?

Our attention grabber may be dramatic, such as dealing with addiction, or death of a loved one, illness or a bright shining light coming out of the forest. Or perhaps it will be a different kind of encounter.

One priest I know tells of her story of waking up when she was hiking one day, came around a corner in the trail and encountered a deer in the path, about five feet away. Both were startled to see each other and neither moved for several moments. My friend did not hear a voice but in the eyes of the deer she saw God’s creation and Being alive and well. She went on to be the founder of Earth Ministry in the Seattle area – a faith group that has had influence on care of the planet around the planet.

Whatever it may be, start looking! For surely the life of God abounds all around us just waiting to be discovered. Maybe your wakeup call will come in the form of a conversation and a license plate that adds the punctuation. Psalm means sung prayer. I guess I’ll have to tell Bob to start singing his prayers to God!

Amen.

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