

(I Mean,) Lord, To Who Can We Go?

John 6:63b-69

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“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.
but among you there are some who do not believe.”

For Jesus knew from the first
who were the ones that did not believe,
and who was the one that would betray him.

And he said, “For this reason I have told you
that no one can come to me
unless it is granted by the Father.”

Because of this many of his disciples turned back
and no longer went about with him.

So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?”

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go?
You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and know
that you are the Holy One of God.”

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I.

To say I'm "embarrassed" by what I'm about to tell you is, perhaps, too strong a sentiment. "Chagrined," would probably be more accurate. For the past few weeks, after supper has ended and with dishes done, Linda and I have been affording ourselves the opportunity to go sit out on the dock at twilight; sometimes with others, more often, though, its just the two of us. Given the rain, and the need to be in town, we haven't managed to sit out *every* evening but we've strung together a nice run. The truth is, we sit and talk like this most evenings throughout the year, in part to catch up with each other on the day's events, and to anticipate what the following day will bring. Mostly, though, it has become a ritual of pausing to recognize and be thankful for all that we have been given. However, the difference of late is that we are doing so out of doors.

II.

We observe the loons out fishing, and hear them calling to each other. Some evenings the osprey circles overhead waiting to swoop down on an unsuspecting fish. Every once and awhile we'll see a mink prowling the shoreline. Turtles occasionally swim by poking their heads above the surface, fish jump all over the place and tempt me to toss a lure and wet a line, ducks fly overhead and, this summer, there has been a kingfisher flying back and forth between islands, going one way in the morning and the other in the evening, as if commuting to and returning from work. Most nights, it seems as if we are the only people sitting outside to observe and absorb these wonders; and, we delight in being present to hear the proverbial tree fall in the woods.

III.

The past few weeks, however, we've been joined by another player in this cast of naturally occurring characters: the moon. I've *always* loved the night sky. Unfortunately, having enough darkness to see this nightly amazement is more an exception than the rule for most people in this day and age of electricity, neon and streetlights.

I remember late one night, out in Minnesota, I was running dogs cold and silent on a trail that wound its way through the forest. At a point, the trail came out on a frozen lake and, with no trees to hit, I turned off my headlamp. After my eyes adjusted, I gazed up to be startled by the immense expanse that is the Milky Way. On my vision-quest across the country, in the years prior to my arrival in Canton, I would sit out in the southwestern desert accompanied, always, by Orion's Belt and, at that point, the Hale-Bopp Comet as it streaked slowly across the heavens.

IV.

Six years ago, during the RV trip our family took across country, viewing stars and moon was a nightly ritual, being humbled again and again by the enormity of the dizzying scope of what we were witnessing and, correspondingly, our own very small place in it. Though we have certainly done our fair share of star-gazing and night sky watching the past 17 summers at the cottage, it seems that this summer, sitting on the dock at twilight watching the stars come out and the moon rise, Linda and I have become a bit more attentive. And, I confess, more than a little chagrined at the realization of how much I DON'T know about celestial bodies, astral constellations and, especially, the moon which rose first a few weeks ago as a crescent in the east, accompanied by Jupiter, and has been slowly rising more to the south and, then, ever westerly with each new evening, waxing as it goes and, now, almost full.

V.

For most of human existence, up until the industrial revolution, the stars and the moon were *the* means by which people *kept* time and understood their place *within* the passing of time. Against the enormous backdrop of the cosmos, stunningly evident and on display each and every night, humility about one's place in the universe was simply an irrefutable reality to which one could either acquiesce or, spend a life-time trying to ignore.

Our scripture reading this morning, from the 6th chapter of John's Gospel, is a remarkably poignant instance of running up against this same kind of irrefutable reality: namely, the spirit and life of Jesus; the carpenter from Nazareth. Among those who followed him, within both the disciples and crowds, Jesus was very aware that there were some who simply could not give

themselves over to the belief in who he was and what he represented; as this required a faith that was too great for many.

VI.

In contrast to these feint of faith were the few who abided Jesus, not only on this particular day, but all throughout his ministry; witnesses to both the remarkable and the mundane. While it might be nice to think that these folks were champions of religious piety, today's text clearly demonstrates the truth of the matter: their rational minds left no other choice *but* to believe; and, more to the point, to respond with their lives in accordance with such a belief.

After chasing off most of his own followers, Jesus turned to those who remained and asked, "*Do you also wish to go away?*" In response, Peter gives a remarkably honest and somewhat surprising response: "I mean, lord, to whom can we go?" Having come to understand and accept that Jesus possessed the words of eternal life, they had come to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Period. End of story. Meaning, what other choice did they have but to follow where Jesus would lead?

VII.

The life of faith, though heroic in many ways is, at it's root, really just a matter of recognizing and appreciating the reality of one's situation; like looking up and finally seeing, *really* seeing, the night sky. Though it is there all the time, we are often too occupied with lesser tasks to notice. The pace of life keeps our eyes cast downward, forcing us to focus merely on the next step required of us. We are too busy trying to catch our breath to gaze out to the horizon, let alone up to the sky. In a futile effort, we endeavor to generate our own little lights to keep at bay the darkness we so fear, but such feeble attempts only serve to obscure the Light in the darkness which is always shining out upon us. And, so, we miss the splendor of the cosmos, and fail to recognize our very small place in it; as well as the mercy and comfort such a realization affords. Against such a backdrop, there is very little we can do; or, need to do.

VIII.

In the final analysis, then, all we *must* do is to live as children of the light. Not out of some epic, oversized or unattainable faith, but by simply accepting our irrefutable reality, and striving to live our lives in accordance with it. The first step in doing so, is having the awareness and attentiveness of the God who is all around us: in the stars, moon and natural world, and in the family, friends, neighbors and strangers who define our days. To sit out in the evening at twilight, or to still oneself in the morning with a cup of coffee or tea, or to get out into the woods, on to the waterways, or up to the heights the region in which we live so amply provides. Such a journey may consist of many miles or merely a few steps. Either way, the goal is always the same: to get beyond ourselves and, at the same time, to come home to ourselves.

IX.

The second and final step in accepting the irrefutable reality of God, is to be fully present *in* that reality, which is our *own* reality. The past two weeks, since returning from vacation, I have been simply amazed to witness, like the stars in the night sky, what all of you are doing in your lives: caring for and raising children, working on relationships, making a living, caring for parents, nurturing grandkids, struggling, striving and sanguine all along the way and at every turn. Like the loons, osprey, mink, fish, turtles, and kingfisher, you press forward in going about your lives with courage, strength, purpose and no small amount of beauty; it is a wonder to behold. Period. End of story.

X.

I confess, though, that I am chagrined to realize just how much is going on with each of you, and just how much I don't know about all of you. However, I am delighted to recognize such knowledge and experiences stand as gifts still unopened, to be received in the many days ahead we will have the privilege and joy to share with each other.

I would like to end today's sermon with a request and a reading. Tonight just happens to be a full moon; known, variously, as the Sturgeon Moon, the Green Corn Moon, or the Grain Moon indicating what is happening at this time of year. Tonight, though, is also a Blue Moon; the second full moon in the same month. Take a few moments tonight, look to the west and, just once in this blue moon, consider your place in God's creation.

XI.

Finally, hear these words of Jesus, whom we have come to believe and know is the Holy One of God, and the one to whom we can go. From Matthew chapter 6:

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to their stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Let us, today, endeavor to be people of such little faith. Amen.