

“Solvitur ambulando”
A sermon by the Reverend Joe Genau
for Edgewood Presbyterian Church
John 1:35-51
January 14, 2018 - Beloved Community Sunday

Some 2,400 years ago, in the heyday of Greek philosophy, there lived a man named Diogenes who was one of the fathers of the school of thought known as Cynicism. The Cynics rejected the trappings of wealth and power and fame, seeking to live a simple life. Diogenes took this to the extreme. He started living in a wine tub and was known to accost people in the marketplace with a lantern in his hand in the middle of the day saying, “I’m just looking for an honest man!”

Diogenes pursued wisdom with a wicked sense of humor, and some of the stories about him are not fit for Sunday morning worship. But perhaps my favorite was his response to the philosopher Zeno’s paradoxes of motion. Without going through a whole explanation, I’ll tell you that Zeno strung together a series of logical arguments and concluded that motion is an illusion. What can I say, there was no Netflix in 5th Century BCE Greece. Well, the story goes that upon hearing this carefully articulated deduction of how motion is impossible, Diogenes responded by standing up and walking away.

Jesus was walking by and John the Baptist again points him out as the Lamb of God and immediately two of John’s disciples start following Jesus. He turns and asks them “What are you looking for?” And I need someone to remember that question for us. We’ll revisit it in seventy-seven days.

The disciples don’t know how to respond to that, so they answer his question with one of their own: “Where are you staying?” Presumably they want to know what kind of accommodations they might be in for, but their question is far deeper than they realize. It’s translated “Where are you staying?” but it could just as easily be “Where are you remaining?” or “Where are you waiting?” or “Where are you abiding?” In the Gospel of John, when you ask Jesus a question that could have multiple meanings, his eyes light up. *Where are you abiding?* “Come and see.”

He doesn’t give them an address. He doesn’t answer them directly. He tells them to come and see. They want to know where he is abiding, and they don’t realize what they’re asking, not by a long shot. And he answers them, but they don’t realize it’s the answer. Not by a long shot. If they want to know about his abiding, they’ll have to come and see. They’ll have to keep following him. They’ll have to put on their good sandals. The answer to their question is not coordinates. It’s not a landmark. It’s not information. This is a different of knowledge. The answer to their curiosity is discovered by following him.

It is solved by walking.

These disciples, Andrew, and the other, and then Peter, and then Philip and Nathanael and on and on all the way down to you and me, will discover that anything you want to know about Jesus, you have to learn by walking with him. You have to be actively pursuing the question. You have to encounter him. Simply being told won’t do.

Jesus finds Philip and says “Follow me.” And then Philip tells Nathanael that they’ve found the Messiah, and

that it's this Jesus from Nazareth. And Nathanael replies, "Nazareth? Really? Why are we looking for salvation from that place? Isn't it more likely that salvation would come from Jerusalem, or some other great city? Nazareth - that town is a hole." Nathanael didn't actually say "can't we get a savior from a place like Norway?" But he did consider Nazareth to be a cruddy place. In 2017, a wildly popular podcast coined the term "S-Town" in reference to Woodstock, Alabama. *S-Town* stands for what you think it does, and it's what you're allowed to call a place *if you're from there*. That's what Nathanael thought of Nazareth, and he wasn't from there.

Philip replies, "Come and see."

Nathanael goes to investigate, and even with Jesus messing with him, he comes to believe and follow. Walking with Jesus here at the beginning of the gospel will get you into conflicts and cause you to meet fascinating people. You'll be part of healing and feeding hungry mouths and forgiveness and stepping in on behalf of the vulnerable and restoration and new life. You'll hear him tell you that he is the bread of life and the life and the resurrection, and you'll understand and you'll be transformed not because he told you but because you walked with him and the pieces started falling into place for you. Following him will mean walking toward Jerusalem and letting him wash your feet and hearing him pray in anguish and then cry out on a cross. And then there will be that question that we're holding onto for seventy-seven days — "What are you looking for?" — asked a little differently, early, while it was still dark, in a garden.

We'll find that salvation comes out of Nazareth, because that's how God works. God goes to the places where people are willing to walk to find the solution. If you are willing to walk in search of answers, God is with you. If you are willing to walk across a border in search of liberty, God is with you. If you are willing to march in the streets to demand that your own nation treat you with equality, God is with you. God is a big fan of *S-Towns* and *S-Nations* and *S-People*, especially when they've been given those names by powerful people who are not willing to come and see what God is doing.

Here it is Beloved Community Sunday on the day before we remember the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I can't help but think of all the walking that was done in the Civil Rights movement. Adults and children marched in the streets of Birmingham. On the First Sunday in Lent in 1965, marchers attempted to cross a bridge in Selma named for a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. They saw the armed police, and they kept marching, and they were attacked and brutally beaten. The words Pam read before our scripture were delivered at the March on Washington. So much walking. So much saying to a nation unwilling to move, "come and see the truth of what we Americans are willing to do to each other."

Dr. King spoke often of the Beloved Community, a phrase he did not coin, but one he pursued with every step. It was a global vision in which poverty would not be tolerated, bigotry would be rejected, and violence would be put aside in favor of a spirit of equality and nonviolence and justice.

Just when we think that we, as a planet, are inching closer to this vision, we discover that those who seem to have the most power are still invested in abiding with poverty and bigotry and violence. Let us be clear, the disturbing and un-Christlike part of what the President is reported to have said about immigrants of color is not the salty language. It's the assertion that you can tell the content of one's character by the color of their skin. It's the belief that some nations hold good, desirable people, while others do not. The words are vile, not because of the cursing, but because of the racism and absolute abhorrence of the concept of walking together.

We are still in need of salvation, and it will not come from Washington, and it will not come from New York, and it will not come from Norway. It will come from Nazareth. It will come from Selma. It will come from Haiti. It will come from South Africa. It will come from the places where the choice is made to pursue a community of the beloved where healing and forgiveness and restoration and reconciliation are discovered by walking with people whose culture and religion and skin color is different from your own.

Jesus asks what we are looking for, and we don't know, so we ask where he abides. "Come and see," he replies, an invitation to follow a path that will mean encountering so much and so many along the way, and finding ourselves transformed. And our deepest questions were deeper than we knew and the answers so much more profound. Motion is possible. Transformation is within our grasp. Beloved Community is on the tip of our tongues. None of it is easy — there are no simple solutions. But getting started sure is. You just have to get up and walk.