

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 1:29-42

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

January 19, 2020

The Second Sunday after Epiphany

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I love to procrastinate. But...that word “procrastinate” sounds a little negative. So, let me restate it...I do better under pressure. That sounds better.

I have a habit of convincing myself that even though I am not doing the thing I need to do, at least I am thinking about it, letting my creative juices flow while I put it off until another day or a better time. I tell myself...I have other important things to do. I will get to that other stuff later.

Well, that other stuff is usually my sermon. Like this week, it was 4:30pm on Friday afternoon, I still didn't have a word on the page. Sure...I had read numerous commentaries. I had studied the scripture. I had thought about and waited for inspiration on what the scripture was calling forth.

And then, there was this really funny video on Instagram of a horse playing in his pasture. That seemed important. Bailey our dog wanted some attention so I gave him treats. I got tired and thought I should “rest my eyes” just for a moment. I was thirsty so I fixed myself a drink. There were a few brownies on the counter...they looked really good so I ate them. And then it was 5:00 and then 5:30. Still no sermon.

But, I still had Saturday morning, right? I will just keep waiting for that inspiration as I eat another brownie.

And then, it hit me...putting off what needs to be done is easy. Doing the work is what takes focus and discipline.

When it comes to faith, these two things (focus and discipline) are essential if we desire to be truly engaged with our journey...Not just bystanders or fair-weather church goers, not just the kind of folks who pray when we need something, but the kind of people who say – I want to be committed to my spiritual development, I want to know God more deeply, and I want to live in a way that reflects that commitment.

I think deep down we all want that fullness of faith in our lives, a faith that leads us each morning, guides us through difficult times, directs our actions and our words, grounds us in the knowledge and love of God. But when we leave this place on Sunday mornings, it's really hard to keep an active, engaged pursuit of spiritual growth at the forefront. We procrastinate. We get distracted. Life is busy. And faith can be easy to forget if we aren't careful.

Remember... putting off what needs to be done is easy. Doing the work is what takes focus and discipline.

So, I was really compelled this week to read John through this lens of faith commitment. As I thought about those two words: focus and discipline, I realized our text provides some important guidance to help us become more dedicated and committed to our spiritual growth.

Let's first set the stage with this notion...what you cultivate in your life is what will grow. What you cultivate is what will grow. And, if you ignore the cultivation, if you procrastinate in tending that inner part of yourself, what will happen? As any gardener knows, things will wilt, grow weak, and they won't be productive. To grow the things that matter, you have to focus on a plan of growth and become disciplined in carrying out that plan.

Focus is defined as one's center of interest, our most important activity. Discipline is the process we engage to create a habitual ability to maintain that focus. It's how we train our hearts and minds to hold as central that which we have prioritized.

We all understand those basic concepts. Now, let's put them into context. In John, we find Jesus calling forth a few of his disciples. He is calling them to focus on this new priority of following him and to be disciplined in their participation. How does he do that?

First, he asks his disciples, "What are you looking for?" Second, he tells them to "come and see." Finally, we are told an exact time that these actions take place. It's a three step process. Look, see, and do.

So, step one...What are you looking for? The process of focus and discipline in John starts with the disciples taking time to reflect on what it is that they desire. They are asked to reflect on what is important to them. Is it Jesus they are looking for or is it something else? Their engagement with naming their desire is critical. Their answer comes in the form of a question, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

This is a great question and one that our modern ears will most likely miss the greater point of what is happening. Bear with me as we have a little vocabulary lesson. The Greek word for "stay," as in where are you staying, is "meno" which translates as abide. Abide is a rich word in Greek which implies a committed presence, a lasting time together, a new way of being with one another.

In fact, our text has already used this word a number of times before the disciples even ask this question. When the Spirit descends on Jesus, it remained on him. "Remain" is the same word as "stay" in Greek. Thus the Spirit abided with Jesus, stayed with Jesus, remained with Jesus. It did not leave him. The change caused through this abiding of the Spirit was life altering.

And so we find the disciples using this same concept when they answer Jesus' question. They answer, "Jesus, where are you abiding?" Because that's where we want to be. After they have

reflected on what it is they are looking for, their response is clear...we want to abide with you. As they look within their hearts, they make a commitment to focus on Jesus.

Step two...Jesus then invites them to come and see. This simple phrase is deep with meaning. It isn't an invitation to simply take a peek at where Jesus is living, it's an invitation to see this new commitment not only with their eyes but with their minds. To encounter this new Spirit with a total dedication, a total discipline of mind and body. Are you willing to really abide with me? To linger here, to grow here, to stay here? Are you willing to see the change that this new life will bring? The goodness, the love, new way of living that will be required of you. The letting go of things that harm you and harm others. If you are, then Come and See. Let me teach you.

Step three...we are told the disciples came and saw where Jesus was staying and we are told they remain with him. They have made the commitment. And, even more interesting, we are told that it was 4pm in the afternoon. That's a rather specific detail. Why does this matter? Why should we care about this quirky detail of time?

Maybe we should care because sometimes we just have to put this kind of spiritual work on our calendar. We can't just expect it to miraculously take place if we don't make time for it. We can't just peek in and say hey, that looks like a good idea. We have to go in and abide there and sometimes we are going to have to schedule it in.

It's a daily decision to commit to what you want to cultivate in your hearts and in your lives. Will it be perfect? No, it won't. Will it be easy? Probably not. Will you have to give up some things along the way? Absolutely.

But with focus and discipline, by our deep abiding in Christ, we can give all of ourselves over to God, the good, the bad, and everything in between. We can experience how that abiding will change our lives for the better, how it will heal us and strengthen us, how it will guide us to new opportunities to love and serve others.

It may feel risky at first, to open yourself up to change. It may take some creative scheduling and letting go of a few things on your already overloaded plate. But, with God's grace, that change, that focus, that discipline will call you ever deeper into a life filled with the Holy Spirit. Don't put it off any longer. Amen.