

Manna Moments

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Scripture John 10.1-10 (Read the whole chapter for more of Jesus's wisdom.)

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kills and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Devotional

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Who are you? A question we ask of ourselves and of others.

A question we ask of Jesus.

Jesus answers in today's scripture passage: I am the shepherd. I am the gate. I am the voice my followers (sheep) recognize and follow, follow into abundant life, the life of God's Kingdom. I am the gate (“bab”, as in gate to knowledge, a title later given to great religious leaders). I am the good shepherd who will do anything, even lose my life and take it up again, so my followers have abundant and eternal life. I am one with the Father.

A question we might ask of the bandits and thieves.

Bandits and thieves do not answer. But Jesus describes them as those who come to steal, kill and destroy. No wonder that even “dumb sheep” know to run and run fast.

Who are you? We have all asked the question of ourselves and, most likely, will continue to ask, as we live in community in Christ. I share two opportunities where I had to answer the question, both around the time I was assigned to my first parish.

Cont.



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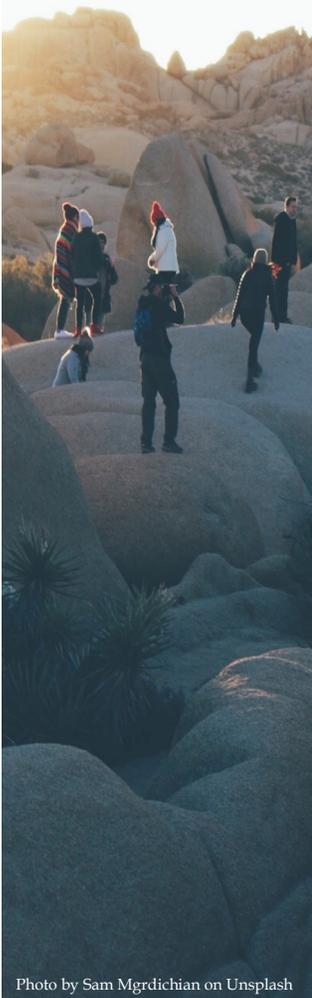
One Sunday, the leader of the local council of a Catholic fraternal organization invited me to join. My predecessor had left and he needed a new chaplain. He also needed a new member (me) so he could earn the title of "blue star council" for the fifth year running. The "blue star" seemed the greater and more urgent need. Now, I was familiar with the organization. My father was active in it when I was growing up. I remember that they performed many works of charity to the living and the dead (including renting their hall to Masonic Lodge events when liquor would be served). The leader said nothing of these things, but did say I did not have to be involved or attend meetings, just become a member (so he could earn his "blue star"). All I can say is he sounded like a bandit, thief and stranger, so I ran.

Not long after, a young couple approached me. They had heard I'd been involved in the "Search for Christian Maturity" (a young adult version of Cursillo) in Southern Indiana. They invited me to join them in bringing Search from the Archdiocese of Chicago to the Diocese of Joliet; like the founding couple, they wanted to help young people to understand and experience what it means to live and grow as a follower of Christ in community. I heard the Lord's voice and accepted. In almost 10 years of Searches, the Search Team (older and younger adult leaders) conducted over 30 weekends, provided weekly opportunities for the community to gather, and accepted an invitation to plant the Search for Christian Maturity in war-torn Northern Ireland.

Most important, in relationship to our theme of community with Christ, is that the talks over the Search weekend were given in pairs, a young woman and young man, who had experienced a weekend and were active in the weekly follow-up gatherings. They shared their experiences of living a life in Christ, as a man or woman, in relationships, as part of organized religion, and other topics. Many times, the pairs supportively held hands as they shared their stories which were marked by tears and smiles and often by a meaningful song. In every one of those talks, we could hear the voice of the shepherd calling us, and started to realize how abundant life is as a result. Each and every talk ended with a pause followed by "IN CHRISTO" (in Christ). Not a "thank you" and a pause while waiting for applause (or a blue star). Just a simple, "IN CHRISTO".

IN CHRISTO was also an invitation to be in community with Christ, to come and join us in the freedom of abundant and eternal life. As the sheep in John's gospel "will come in and go out and find pasture" living life abundantly, the Search community experienced people come and go and come back as they rejoiced and suffered, struggled and grew in Christ. Always freely. Always in Christ.

This is an invitation, as well, to those reading this moment. Identify for yourself experiences when you have been approached by bandits, thieves and strangers. How did you choose to respond? Identify experiences when you heard the shepherd's voice. How did you choose to follow?



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Closing note: I received a call about 25 years after we left Chicago for Michigan. It was from the couple who started Search for Christian Maturity in Chicago, for their kids and their kids' friends. They were building a scrapbook of the community over time, saw me in some pictures, found my number and called. They called to catch up and remind me I am always a part of the Search community. IN CHRISTO!

Prayer or Thought of the Day

*The whole world lives in your love, holy God, and we are your people. Send us out in faith to tell your story and to demonstrate your truth to people of every race and nation, so that, won by your powerful word, the world of humankind may consciously join together as one communion of saints giving you praise, and living to serve you **in Christ** the Lord. Amen.*

(Modified from [The Worship book](#), Presbyterian, 1972)

Notes:

