

The Reverend Shelley Ryan
St. Luke's Episcopal Church - Anchorage, Kentucky
The Second Sunday after the Epiphany: Year A ~ Jan. 14 & 15, 2017
John 1:29-42

While growing up on the east coast of Florida, I was always intrigued by the phenomenon of sunken treasure. As I wandered along the shore and gazed out at the vastness of ocean I wondered about all of the treasure that lay hidden upon the ocean's floor - so precious and valuable, yet so inaccessible. For several hundred years numerous ships have traversed Florida's coastal waters taking great risk in doing so. Not long after the discovery of the New World, Spain began to transport riches acquired through the Aztec and Incan empires to Europe, and silver and gold-laden treasure ships frequented the Florida coastline. These arduous journeys were not without risks, and numerous ships succumbed to the elements of Mother Nature (hurricanes, jagged coral reefs, and treacherous shallow waters) which resulted in some of these ships sinking to the ocean floor.

However, since gold, silver, and precious gems were so highly prized the risk was simply a part of the journey, and so the fleets of ships continued to transport the valuable treasures across the Atlantic Ocean. One journey that took place in July of 1715 included several galleons and merchant ships packed with valuable treasures that set sail from the New World (Havana) for Spain. Only a few days into the journey, the fleet encountered a hurricane that destroyed the ships just miles off of the East coast of Florida.

To this day many folks regularly navigate up and down the coasts of Florida in search of sunken treasure. One such group of folks was the Schmitt family, and they were a team of avid treasure hunters. One hot summer afternoon while salvaging ship wreck they made an amazing discovery. Eric Schmitt (a master diver) unearthed a 'priceless' religious artifact from the ocean

floor. Not knowing exactly what the object was, he knew that it was indeed a valuable find, and the family celebrated with great elation. They assumed that the gold piece was a part of a small picture frame, but they soon learned that there was another piece of this artifact that had been discovered by treasure hunters from the same shipwreck some twenty-five years earlier.

Upon further research by underwater archeologists it was determined that the Spanish artifact was not a picture frame at all. The ornate trinket of hand-crafted gold filigree was a 'Pyx.' A Pyx is a vessel used by priests to house the consecrated communion hosts. Once the gold pieces were fitted together the Pyx was an illustrious sight to behold. Yes. The gold-filigree Pyx was indeed a valuable treasure in and of itself, but a greater treasure, much greater than that of gold or silver would have carefully encased the consecrated Host within the trinket.

The search for treasure revealed a much greater discovery than the Schmitt family ever imagined. Certainly, the discovery of valuable sunken treasure would bring great satisfaction, and also great wealth! But after the 'honeymoon' is over so to speak, or the dream vacation has ended, or the promotion at work isn't quite what we thought it would be, or the accomplishment of a long sought-out goal has been attained and now what? We - like the Schmitt family, find ourselves going out in search of more treasure because we long for more. This constant and restless journey is often exhausting. When is it ever enough? Will we ever be satisfied?

The disciples mentioned in today's gospel (Andrew and the anonymous disciple- whom some scholars believe to have been the author of this gospel) were searching, and unexpectedly the greatest treasure, Jesus, was upon them. And though Jesus is the greatest treasure of all, He is never hidden from us. We are not required to labor intensively to attempt to find Him, for He is among us, always. He makes himself available to each of us, and we only need speak His name. "He is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" who sees the ugliness of our sin

with the eyes of the Great Physician who yearns to heal us. The door has been opened for us, and we only need walk in. God opens this door through Baptism and proclaims “Welcome home my child! Welcome home!” what greater treasure can there be? *Karl Bart* expresses “*God in Christ opens the door of righteousness from within. He brings the unrighteous in instead of talking to them from a closed door.* He is always available. He is not hidden. The door is open.

Andrew and the other disciple were disciples of John’s, and yet they knew of the great gift/treasure that was among them. As Jesus was identified by John as “the Lamb of God”, they did not hesitate to follow Jesus. Moreover, even though they had been disciples of John, he made no effort to hinder them from doing following Jesus. The disciples were searching, they were in search of the greatest gift, the greatest treasure, and they discovered that He was in the midst of them.

As they followed behind Jesus, being aware of their presence Jesus turns and asks them quite an ordinary question, but with extraordinary significance “What are you looking for?” Sometimes the English translations can obscure the meaning of the original Greek, and in this case the question may be more accurately translated as “What are you seeking?” It’s a question that is worth wrestling with, because our answer to this question will have tremendous impact on what we will find, and also the journey that we will take to achieve this find.

Deep down to the core of your being, what are you searching for? What are you seeking? I would imagine that many, if not most, of us are also searching, and I wonder if we were to behold Jesus in the flesh he would likely ask us the same question “What are you seeking?” How would we answer this? How would you respond? Something to ponder....

The two disciples were asked this question face to face by Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Word that became flesh, the true light. They had an extraordinary opportunity to ask Jesus

anything, anything at all. And what did they ask Him? They mustered up the courage to ask “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Again the English translation muddles the significance of this phrase, as the Greek verb is *meno* means to abide, remain, and to dwell in a sense of permanence and stability. So wherever Jesus abides His followers will have the opportunity to abide in Him.

Jesus lovingly responds to their question saying “Come and see.” What an invitation so freely given by Jesus. He didn’t have a permanent dwelling (so to speak) to lay His head so He likely selected a place along the riverbank, and welcomes them to abide with Him. “Come and see.” This is a distinct call to a personal act of faith. Jesus is the most valuable treasure and is accessible to all. He is a gift, a priceless treasure for all of mankind – we only need open our hearts to behold this greatest treasure of all treasures.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21 (NRSV)

Amen.