

February 4, 2024

Texts: Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39

Title: "Seeking Christ"

There was a story out a while ago about a couple in Canton, Ohio that thought they saw the image of Jesus in the wood grain of a door in their house and it was so striking that they cut it out of the door and carried it with them when they moved to another house. They said that they kept it because the thought of it gave them encouragement. And they felt so strongly about it that they shared this image with others and it got a lot of publicity. I'm sure you've heard of things like this including the woman in Florida who claimed she saw Jesus' image in a potato chip!

My guess is that we see what we want to see, and our deepest yearning of all is to see Jesus, in other words, to encounter God. And so, in our search for meaning our eyes pick up patterns that, while random, seem to reveal God's presence. And that gives us peace and...hope. And we want the world to know what we've seen.

We're just a few weeks from the season of Lent and you can be sure that on the week before Easter, you'll see Jesus on the cover *Time*. Someone once asked the religion reporter for the *Washington Post* why that was. He said that every time Jesus is on the cover of these magazines, they see a spike in their sales. He's commercially attractive. Jesus is just as popular as ever.

And he was also popular when he first began his ministry two thousand years ago. The scene we have in our lesson from the gospel of Mark takes place at the house of

Simon Peter where Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law. And by "evening, the whole city had gathered around the door" bringing their sick to be healed.

I guess this was the first-century equivalent of the flash mob. No cell phones or Twitter though. They had to do it the old-fashioned way, person to person. Everyone wanted to see Jesus. The next morning he goes out to pray and Simon comes and says, "Everyone is searching for you." Jesus was a rock star.

And even today people everywhere are still looking for him. They may not know his name but they have a deep spiritual longing and they're searching to meet that need.

Everyone needs a sense of direction for his or her life. There are a lot of people who aren't feeling well about the state of their lives right now. We may feel that we've lost our way or as someone once told me, "My train's always off the track."

Year ago, someone asked me, "What's your purpose in life?" Caught me off guard. I had no answer. I would have preferred to not think about it. Embarrassed and wondering to myself, "What does it mean that I have no reason to be alive, no purpose?" It's possible to be living, maybe we are making a living, but going nowhere, just surviving.

And of course, my message is that a big part of the answer is spiritual. In turning to Christ we can find or recover meaning and purpose and we can start to experience what it is to have joy.

We find direction for our lives in Christ but also, we find someone we can follow for Christ not only points the way, he goes with us and leads the way for us. Jesus had disciples who followed him during his earthly ministry. They learned the principles for a powerful life and they did what he did. They didn't do it perfectly but they found something powerful in Jesus and they were compelled to follow him. And what did he call them / us to do? Have faith in a power greater than yourself, pray; connect with that power and find hope, and then to serve, do what Jesus did. He told us to give of selves and our resources sacrificially, in other words, be generous in every way. And in living the Christ life, the spiritual life, the giving life, we find purpose and direction or as Jesus called it, the abundant life. But some of us this morning may feel that they're experiencing more brokenness than abundance.

Sometime back, *The Christian Century* magazine carried a story by Lillian Daniel. It was about her parent's collection of Southeast Asian pottery which they had collected over the years, and carefully kept it in their home.

But there was one piece that always seemed out of place, an antique vase with a blue Japanese design, but it was damaged. And yet her parents kept it and displayed it. It looked like it had been broken into many pieces and then crudely glued together glue coming out of the cracks. Not very beautiful. And Lillian told her mother that she ought to just throw it out. So her mother told her the story behind it.

Her father had bought that vase when he was a journalist covering the Vietnam

War. He carefully wrapped it and hand carried it all the way home to the US. But at the moment her dad walked up the driveway, his two-year-old daughter rushed toward him with her arms outstretched for a hug. He tried to hold on to it and hug his daughter but when he did it fell and broke into pieces. Lillian Daniel, of course, was that two-year-old. She ends her story like this: “Thus it was that night, my mother pulled out the glue, she repaired it, and she pronounced it precious.”

That cracked vase was almost as precious to her mother as we cracked and imperfect vessels are to God. Those who trust in Jesus and seek to walk in his steps are the recipients of abounding and overflowing love and grace. And even though we are imperfect in our service to Christ and humanity, God’s love for us and acceptance of us never stops.

No wonder people see Jesus on doors, and even potato chips. Everyone deep down wants what Jesus can provide. Isn’t that what you are looking for today?