

March 14, 2021 Sermon by Lori C. Morton

Psalms 42 and Numbers

Ephesians 2:1-10

John 3:14-21

“The Gift of Getting Lost”

I am guessing,

everyone has gotten lost at some time.

The Carlsons shared a story of each, individually coming across the same woman
in Costco

looking very lost.

When they asked if they could help, she said, “I’ve lost my husband.”

As a backpack guide,

we used the tell campers

if they ever got lost, hug a tree.

Maybe not literally, but rather than wander,

most likely getting more lost

stay put, until rescue comes.

There is much speculation why Nicodemus wandered out, under the cloak of night
to seek out Jesus.

It is pretty clear he is lost.

Jesus had recently chased animals out of the temple

and, flipped over the money changers’ tables.

The Pharisees and other religious leaders discussed the authority

Jesus asserted in doing what he did

and, questioned if, Jesus was a teacher of God or a threat.

Either Nicodemus wasn’t convinced by his colleagues’ arguments,

maybe sensed he should pay attention to Jesus and his teachings, ...

but, wasn’t ready to be seen outright with Jesus. Or

He is representing the religious leaders; not thinking he is lost,

but, trying to trap Jesus

in some form of heresy - false teaching about God.

If he wasn't lost before he got there,

the conversation definitely left him scratching his head; confused
mentally and spiritually lost

when Jesus tells him he needs to be born again / anew
in order to recognize the kingdom of God.

And, only the Holy Spirit can do this; can show him the way.

A way of faith / trust, revealing abundant life
for him to begin living that very night.

This makes no sense to Nicodemus, so

Jesus tells him a story he would know from the book of Numbers.

The Hebrews are still traveling with Moses and God in the wilderness.

I can imagine it was starting to feel like they were going around in circles.

There is a cartoon that circulates social media

depicting Moses with a GPS and the people of God behind him murmuring,
"Recalculating".

God had been relatively understanding up to this point.

This wasn't the Hebrews first, "we-want-to-go-back-to-slavery" whine-fest.

In response, God sweetened their water,
provided manna from heaven, for the meat eaters - quail.

But, in Numbers, God no sooner solved their problem
when they started complaining again.

This time, scripture says God sent poisonous snakes, which bit and killed many of the
people. Sent or let them crawl out of their holes or a coincidence shortly after

God didn't respond to their whining in a positive way ... they blamed God
and turned to Moses for help

Moses turned to God

and instead of removing the snakes from their path,

God tells Moses to create a bronze snake and place it on a pole.

When the people turn and look at it,
they will be healed.

Look at the thing they fear most.

Look up at the consequence of their inability to trust God.

Yes, maybe the Hebrews got tired of following Moses and some
bailed on the caravan and the zig-zagging
chose a way that led them directly into a nest of snakes
waking up from hibernation
God was trying to have them avoid.

Whatever the case, Nicodemus would get the significance of what Jesus was saying,
Alluding to the crucifixion, Jesus says the Son of God will provide the same
healing and salvation, when everyone turns and looks upon the cross.

Pastor and writer, Jan Richardson, describes all this as a strange remedy.¹
Suzanne Guthrie - the cross Mundi Medicina "Medicine of the World"²
Quoting a monastic hymn by Bonaventure in the 13th century.
That which causes pain or possible death, also gives us life.

In our time, vaccinations shed light on this kind of healing³.

Edward Jenner was the first to observe that milkmaids exposed to cowpox,
did not get small pox, the deadly version of the disease.

Later, Jonas Salk figured out how to immunize people
with deactivated polio virus, preventing millions from
developing the paralyzing symptoms.

The vaccine I took when I was a child
was an oral version with live virus, which
organizations like Rotary continue to distribute around the world to children,
Hoping one day, to eliminate this terrible disease.

The only thing preventing this is trust and areas unsafe to travel because of war.

Vaccine, snake, the cross: versions of what cause us dis-ease,
lifted up, so we might live
no longer lost, but found by God's grace and love for the world.

¹ Painted Prayer Book <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2018/03/05/lent-4-strange-remedies/>

² edgeofenclosure.org "Soulwork Toward Sunday: Self-Guided Retreat Lent 4 (Year B)"

³ Scott Hozee, https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/lent-4b-3/?type=the_lectionary_gospel

The cross, our compass point, the Holy Spirit keeps calling us to look to.

Full trust in God and God's kingdom come, prevented Jesus from getting lost.

Living the way of God's kingdom also got him killed.

As Debie Thomas states it, “[Jesus] died because he exposed the ungracious sham at the heart of all human kingdoms, holding up a mirror that shocked his contemporaries and still shocks us at the deepest levels of our imaginations.”⁴

Yes, it is still hard to trust that “God’ kingdom of peace, restorative justice, radical love, grace, freedom, and hope” can save us.

In the cross, we see what we trust more: violence, oppression, exploitation, wealth, power, constant consumption, and all the other broken systems we keep rebuilding, thinking we will get a new result this time.

Because we aren't willing to stay lost long enough to be found.

Aren't willing to hug a tree; especially one that looks like the cross because it wants more than belief.

It wants our wholehearted trust God's way
will not only get YOU where you need to go,
but, also the whole world God so loves.

Yes, today, the Dark Wood invites us to reflect upon the gift of being lost contemplating what got you here and letting God show you a better way.

Eric Elnes says he pays more attention when he is feeling lost⁵.

That the Holy Spirit has always offered a “strange remedy”⁶
during these times. Often times overlooked or disregarded
But, when he stopped trying to find his way,
started listening, let go of his plans

he found opportunities and healing where he hadn't thought to look.

Thankfully, even when we miss the cues,

⁴ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=2944> “Looking Up” March 7, 2021

⁵ Gifts of the Dark Wood, pg 85

⁶ Jan Richardson

God's mercy and love will not give up on us.

Yes, the Spirit keeps coming, calling, nudging, inviting us, challenging
to return to the path of life and the next best step.

I am guessing God has even used you to do this for someone else.

Take the length of a song to consider those times you were lost
what helped you to find your way? Or who?

A conversation with a stranger, question, story, song ...
that woke you up and helped you see
a way, where once you thought there was no way.

This week, find a rock and write or paint a word or image you sense
if someone came across it in their dark wood ... with the Spirit's help
might point the way for them?