

Advent II, December 7, 2014 Mark 1:1-8 Nigel Taber-Hamilton

When you were a child did you ever play what in England is called “Hide-and-Seek”? Have you played it a parent or grandparent with your kids or grand-kids? You remember how it goes, right? One person is “it” and hides their eyes and counts to a set number - say 100. Everyone else goes and hides. Then the person who’s “it” cries out “ready or not, here I come!” and goes looking!
Last one to be found wins!

Who wanted to be the seeker? You know who you are! And who wanted to go hide? Maybe what ‘side’ of the game you choose says something about whether you’re an introvert or an extravert!

If you hide too well it can get boring! ‘Course if you can’t find folk that’s no fun either.

I remember as a teenager another kid telling how the “hidiers” decided they didn’t want to play with her – she was the person who was “it.” So while she hid her eyes they went off to the local park to play. Another told of trying really, really hard to hide because he didn’t want to be found.

Thinking back I can see that there’s more to the game than just simply hiding and seeking! It’s an interactive game that requires hiding and finding to be fun. If everyone doesn’t agree on the rules, or doesn’t honor them, well, then the game loses a lot of it’s fun – it doesn’t mean much any more.

Mark’s gospel is about hiding and seeking – we, the readers are invited to seek for Jesus. For Mark the question we should seek answer to is “who?” Who then is this that even the winds and the seas obey him?” Who is this and where does his authority come from? Can God be involved?

The opening verses - which we heard today - set the tone. After what is clearly Mark’s working title: “The Good News about Jesus” – we hear about John the Baptist – is this the one? they ask, or do we seek another? And behind it the deeper question: “who is this elusive God whose identity and purpose seems just out of reach, who seems to dance tantalizingly just beyond our grasp?

Do we play the game by the rules? Do we accept the questions Mark says are important and follow them the way Alice followed the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole? And are we ready for what we might find at the other end?

Hide and seek. But who’s doing the hiding, and who the seeking?

In terms of faith we like to think we’re the seekers. We like to be in control. That’s actually how some Christians are defined and define themselves: “seekers.” And the invitation that Mark issues seems to reinforce that view.

And on some level - more for some, less for others - it’s accurate - we’re all, to a greater or lesser extent, seekers: seekers for meaning, for truth, for joy and peace. We all seek the comfort of God that Isaiah so eloquently describes in today’s Old Testament lesson. We all long for the

peaceable kingdom; we all hope for the joy of knowing God.

So it's accurate to say that we're seekers, but it's incomplete. We all have our ways of hiding, even when we're claiming boldly that we really do want to discover what it means to be seeking a relationship with that which is Holy to us and for us.

We all know that our world invites us to seek for the things that don't really matter, to hope for the things that don't last.....I'm hoping for a new car, or a new washing machine, or I'm hoping for a better job, or better return on my investments.....

T.S. Eliot said, "I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith, but the faith and the love are all in the waiting. Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought: So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing."

Dismantle the hope that's superficial, journey through the despair that comes with recognizing that superficial hope is ultimately worthless, and only then will you find the genuine hope that is the light of God, journey there, and in "the stillness" that follows the anguished cry of misperceived loss, only then then will come "the dancing." To paraphrase Robert Frost, the woods may seem lovely, but we have miles to go this Advent before we can sleep.

We like to think we're the seekers, but the Spirit seeks us too - urgently, inexorably. And if we only stop for a moment and listen and look, we might cry with the psalmist "Where can I go...from your Spirit? where can I flee from your presence? If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast."

Advent is also, therefore, about the God who seeks us out. That's a challenge if on some level we don't want to be found - if we seek to hide from God (and ourselves) so intently that in the words of Lady Macbeth, we "Stop up the access and passage to remorse," we close our hearts to the Divine - and that, of course, means closing our hearts to each other.

As we journey toward the Day of Nativity, are we - you and I - are we willing to open our hearts? Are we willing to be found by God and each other? Or, to put it another way, what do we want to be born in our hearts this Christmas?

John the Baptist shouts on behalf of God: "Ready or not, here I come!" Everyone who allows themselves to be found - by the Spirit and by each other - wins. It's time to get ready for the light, and the dance. AMEN.