

John Bonner
June 10, 2007
Proper 5 – C

Is it Time or Vision?

Sometimes without our prompting, life will alter our pace for us.

Birth of a child, sickness, work stuff, marriage, divorce, etc.

When these events occur we would be wise to rest, survey what is happening, find our bearings.

A friend related the experience of the death of his mother. It had been an ongoing battle which she would lose. The father had called the son home and within days his mother died. This death became the catalyst for intensifying his work. He was driven to the extent that he ignored the signs of what was taking place in his life. His ministry had become his life to the detriment of his family and his own well-being. The death of his mother had propelled him into an unhealthy place. While outwardly his ministry seemed to be thriving, within feelings of loneliness, isolation and shallowness were taking over. There was a current in his life that was pulling him toward a depression he could not find his way out of. He was in uncharted waters for a first time and he realized he needed someone to help him steer his course. He found help in an older priest who was a counselor and his time with this one took him out of the rip current of despair that was surrounding him. He looked at himself clearly with help and discovered new things about himself and about life and about God. The heartache he had felt began to change to a deeper hope than he had ever known. The Holy Spirit was leading him to a new place. As I read the Old Testament reading and the Gospel today it seems that Elijah and Jesus are led by the Spirit to a compassionate place that God needed for them to find. Both women were in a place like my friend, desperate to find a new way. By worldly standards their situations were hopeless but with God all things are possible.

Do you pay attention to the Spirit's leading in your life or are you too caught up in yourself? Do you find yourself 'heavy laden' with the world, in the words of Matthew? Life's destination is not a place but a person. This one, Jesus in his name, wants to be on life's journey with you. God is more interested in you than in your life's success or destination.

The Bible is one big 'journey' story. The best known is the story of the Hebrew people and their trip from Egypt to the Promised Land. If you look at a map this trip should not have taken 40 days BUT it took 40 years! God's great interest was not just getting the Israelites out of Egypt but getting Egypt out of the Israelites. Perhaps their time spent in the wilderness was just God's needing some quality time with these his people so they could know of his faithfulness over and over again.

God wanted them to trust him today. Do you know the definition of 'manna'? It means "What is it?" They had to trust God enough to know that this nameless, unidentifiable stuff would be enough. They were to gather only what they needed for that day. More than that would spoil. Tomorrow God would provide --- again. They could not make it happen...only God could provide for their needs.

The most common words in institutional life are "we've never done it that way before." After all they witnessed from God, the plagues, the parting of the sea, bread from heaven,

water from rocks and on and on...deliverance from their enemies over and over... all they could do was whine and beg and plead to go back to Egypt, back to a life of slavery, back to the familiar.

All churches go through this when new things are on the horizon. Will the vision hold up or will we just status quo our way through life? Will we bury our talent or will we move with the Spirit and do the hard but faithful thing?

Maybe God needed 40 years to nurture a new generation of followers who might be willing to follow him. Trust is what God wants. We are to trust his steps to be those that are best for us. His Spirit leads us to places that are many times unknown, but He knows. Maybe God wanted them/us to grasp a greater purpose for our lives ... to be a people who would/will give witness to him, to this awesome God.

Are we eager to get through whatever challenge we face in life as quickly as possible to achieve our goals? The spiritual journey does not work that way as the Israelites experience reminds us. It is not so much a physical finish line as it is meandering toward becoming all that God has in mind for us to be. Like the Israelites, our ability to discern and follow God's leading has far less to do with time in a chronological sense and much more to do with direction.

Steven Covey's latest book "First Things First" writes about how fixated our culture is on the clock. The clock represents our busyness --- commitments at work, appointments, tasks and schedules. The clock symbolizes how we spend our lives. The compass, on the other hand, represents the personal vision, core values, and principles that shape and guide our lives. Covey suggests more reliance on the compass and less on the clock because it is the compass that has more to do with the direction we intend to follow on our journey. Our God is not a God of chronology but of direction.

Elijah and Jesus teach us today about following in a Godly way. The world said what they did was impossible but they listened to that Spirit deep within and did a new thing, gave a new life. The world is always caught up in the clock, like a kid on a trip, "Are we there yet?" God will always send in the corrective, the course adjustment that says, 'follow me' and don't listen to the world's ways. God's future is always filled with hope but there is no timetable, no drivenness.

God's plan is simple. When you search you find. When you ask you receive. When it is His time it will happen. "If you seek me with your heart, I will let you find me" so Jeremiah said of God's ways. God is our future. God is our hope! Where is He leading us now?

The spiritual journey seldom unfolds in a straight line. We go forward and backward, left and right. We make progress, and we fall behind. Sometimes it seems we are just standing still. The questions we need to ask ourselves are not, how far have we come? How much farther is it? Those are clock questions. Rather, we need to ask am I pointing myself in what I sense through the Spirit to be the right direction? Am I continually orienting myself toward God? Those are compass questions? Those are life questions.