

I shared a Pickles cartoon a while ago. For a few days he had been looking for something. The one I referred to has in the first frame him putting his jacket on and saying that he was going out to get the thing he hasn't been able to find. The next frame has her asking if he had discovered what it was he has been looking for. In the last frame he responds, "No, I may be gone a while!" This came to my mind as I was working on this passage in John's Gospel. The question of Jesus to John's disciples in the NRSV is, "*What are you looking for?*" Or, "*What do you want?*" in the NIV.

It is a good question. Why should they follow after Jesus? What is it about Jesus that causes the two of them to leave John? The scene has John and them observing the crowd and talking. As Jesus walks by, John simply states, "*Look! the Lamb of God.*" The two of them immediately leave John and start after Jesus.

Jesus asks, "*What are you looking for?*" And they simply ask, "*Where are you staying?*" To me, this is not really a response to the question Jesus asked. Maybe they don't know what they are looking for, but they had to say something. Jesus' response was to invite them to, "*Come and see.*" After spending an afternoon with him they have become his followers. They immediately begin to seek others.

Now, I wish they would have answered Jesus' question. But, as I noted, maybe they couldn't. They are seeking, looking for something. They have been following John in the wilderness. They are identified as two of John's disciples (students). As they have listened to John they know that something was happening. The silence of God had been broken. Here was one like a prophet, shouting in the wilderness. He was preparing people for what God was about to do. Here, in Jesus, they see something more than what they had seen in John. Is Jesus the one to fulfill the promise? Remember on the road to Emmaus as Jesus encounters two of his followers after his death. As they were walking down the road they say about Jesus, "*We had hoped he was the One who was going to redeem Israel*" (Luke 24:21).

Our world is full of seekers who can't answer the question, "What are you looking for?" They are looking for a "spiritual" component without knowing what that is. I wonder if this is one of the reasons why the Star Wars franchise has been so popular, "May the force be with you." A guide greater than we know. Something more than what we are. I am not sure if the "force" is ever really identified in the movies.

I read an article this past week about women clergy and clerical collars (something USA Baptists shun - but not in other countries). The question was whether wearing a clerical collar makes any difference when you are visiting a Starbucks or other type of coffee facility. "Does it make a difference in how people approach you?" was the question. The overwhelming response was, "Yes". And, most of the encounters were positive ones (there were a few about women and the priesthood but otherwise most were supportive). Many noted that they were ignored when they were dressed "normally" but when they had the clerical collar on people would come up and ask for prayer, seek forgiveness, etc. People would come wanting to have "honest" conversations about faith issues.

Our world is full of people seeking a "spiritual" connection. Yes, spiritual is hard to define and has different meanings to different people. But, people are looking for something greater than here and now. Too often they have been dismissed by the church for asking too many questions, for not accepting the doctrine without questions. We don't want the boat rocked. A friend has visited several atheist worship services (yes, there are ones). He notes that it is hard to tell these services from ones he has attended in many congregations. People are looking for a connection, for something more but are not sure what. There is something about gathering, singing songs, etc.

The prophet Isaiah writes about the work of the servants of the Lord, "*I have placed you here as a light for other nations, you must take my saving power to everyone on the earth*" (CEV). "*I will also make you a light to the Gentiles...*" (The Message). "*The Holy one of Israel has chosen you...*" Our call is to be a light, a hope to the world. The world is looking for such a light - scanning the horizon for the lighthouses of safety. But, like Pickles, they don't know what they are looking for.

A word of advice, never go shopping with an artist. It takes patience. “What are you looking for?” “I don’t know, but I will when I see it!” Makes it hard to help - but what they are looking for is hard to explain to a non-artist. They know it when they find it - same for John’s disciples.

The same is true for those who are seeking the “spiritual”. They are looking for something more, a light, a hope. They are not looking for judgment, but forgiveness and grace. They are seeking a quiet place - a spiritual place. Something more than what they are finding. Several articles have been written recently about praise music and worship and how it is turning off some young people. If they want that type of experience, music, they can go to a night club. They are looking for the “holy” - a quiet reverence.

The book, Out of the Darkness, by Tony Gielty tells of the search of a young Scottish man. One of the blurbs on the jacket says, “By the age of 19, he was a vicious thug, terrorizing his fellow prisoners and staff at every prison he was sent. He was scheduled for the Ghost Train (moving prisoners from solitary to solitary at three month intervals from one prison to another). He was feared by all.”

In the chapter entitled, “In the land of darkness a light has dawned” Tony tells of a visit by a Catholic priest - a former banker who has left the world of banking and entered the priesthood. (Tony was taken to church by his grandmother when he was younger.)

He tells Tony that he had everything worldly one could want...

...everything that’s supposed to make you happy; and I never was.

Then he told me that, while attending a work night out, he heard the Spice Girls’ song Wannabe”\*, and the words unexpectedly forced him to question what he really wanted in life. His vocation as a priest was birthed out of this, but more than that; he began to experience the peace of knowing Jesus Christ. He realized that only in Him could true joy and peace be found.

Tony then says that he demanded to be taken back to his cell and as he sat on his bed and turned his radio on there were the Spice Girls singing “Wannabe”. He invites the priest for a second visit and this time he brings the Eucharist, “Fr John, through his testimony and now through the Body of Christ, kindled that tiny flame of light that had been left unlit since childhood....After his second visit, I noticed that I could think of nothing but Jesus. Like a person falling in love, I was consumed by thoughts of God.”

We do not know what God will use to light the flame in ones heart. Our task is, in Isaiah’s words, “*I will make you a light...*”

\*I did find the song and read the words - but want to keep my job so won’t share it here! It is easy to find on a Google search!

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New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988

Gielty, Anthony, Out of the Darkness,

Monarch Books, Oxford, UK and Grand Rapids, MI, 2016 (p.104-105)