

The Rev. Canon Timothy Watt+
Year A Proper 14
Preached 20200809

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28
Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b
Romans 10:5-15
Matthew 14:22-33

May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

AMEN!

I think life is full of moments where God meets us on the way to point out the right direction. Think back... has there ever been a moment when someone appeared at just the right time and said just the thing? A moment that shaped the rest of your life?

When I was 15, a strange thing happened. Seemingly out of nowhere a Lebanese Maronite Priest appeared in my small town. He wore traditional dress and had a fantastic, curly beard, that fell down to his chest. Mountain Home was a strait-

laced farming and Air Force community full of levis, flannel shirts, and buzz cuts. To say he sort of stood out is an understatement.

His name was Yuhanna, Aramaic for John... which is what he told us to call him. He also taught us that Father in Arabic was Abouna... So, he was Abouna John... and it was from his mouth that I first heard Jesus' own language, Aramaic... The Our Father trickling out in the actual language that first formed it so long ago. It was magical... mystical... like Abouna John... like the prayer itself. Abouna liked to use so much incense at mass that you couldn't see three feet in front of you... It was AWESOME.

One day, Abouna asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Well, at that point what I wanted to be more than anything else in the world was a Rock Star...

That did not seem to be the thing to tell a mystic priest who looked suspiciously like Jesus... I pulled out my back-up... held at the ready just in case an adult asked this very question, and said, "I want to be a Forest Ranger."

Abouna stared at me... through me... and time stretched long into awkwardness... Did he know what I really want to be? Is he horrified?

Instead after yet a while longer he said, "I think you shall be a priest."

It was the first time someone named it specifically... and though the path was winding and at times I fought it furiously... well...

Here I am. Abouna knew the way I was called to go and he pointed me to it. A while later he vanished as silently as he had appeared. But in him I recognized something of the call of our Lord... Something of Jesus himself.

He has been on my mind this week in the wake of the horrific explosion in Lebanon. He often spoke of Beirut and growing up there... the difficulty of being a Christian there... suffering real persecution, not contrived anger over ginned up politics. And yet out of all that came this gentle soul who first spoke God's call upon me. I hope he is well. I know he is a saint.

He came to mind as my podcast partner and I recorded this week's episode. At the end of the episode we say prayers and ask blessings upon those that come to mind in the Sunday Readings. Gini prayed for those who appear at just the right time to point the way... like the man in the field in the Old Testament lesson that pointed Joseph to his brothers and to his fate. Involuntarily, Abouna came to mind in the place of that man in my mind... such is the echo he holds in my life... as one who pointed my way.

That Joseph followed his direction is critical... from that point on, a series of events begins to unfold that finds Joseph using his gifts to come through extreme adversity to being the vizier of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. And because that man pointed his way and he followed, all the evil shown to him by

his own brothers turns to good... he eventually saves their lives from famine... preserving the line of Israel and extending the story of salvation down through the ages even until now... when it has become our story through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That the man in the field was not named in the Old Testament lesson is important. Every other time that happens in Genesis it is either an Angel or God... God pointing the way that leads us to this day. But Joseph still had to choose to go. He could have very well just gone home to Jacob and told him they were not there... but there was something in the encounter Joseph trusted... and so he went, beginning the perfect chain of events to save his own malicious brothers... and us. One of those brothers was Judah, the very one whose idea it was to sell him

into slavery... But Judah's descendent was King David... whose own eventual heir was Jesus. Things are always redeemable.

Jesus' encounter with Peter was quite different than Joseph's.

The thing that fascinates me about the story of Jesus walking on water is Peter's response, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

How often do we hear the voice of God and wonder "If it is you..." How often do we respond to those sent to point us along right pathways with "If it is you"... I mean... by this time Peter had spent a lot of time with Jesus... How did he not recognize him? How do WE not? This story is an invitation to consider that question for ourselves.

The answer is that we have to really spend time with Jesus as out Rabbi... reading the gospels, praying... Listening in those prayers until we can know with certainty the voice of Jesus and his appearing to us even in the middle of the stormy sea. If we do this faithfully, both alone and together, we will know it when Jesus is passing by...

Even when he does so through one another... In TLC calls and flowers lovingly arranged. In building for a future that serves out community... in dinners shared... in scripture studied... and occasionally maybe even through strange bearded priests.

God speaks to us. Listen. Will we go where God says? Or will we let him just pass on by? God wants to speak through us. Will we

allow God space to do so? Or not finding things as we expect or want, will we just go home?

AMEN.