

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany (Year A)

John 1:29-42

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

Today, we're talking about the Gift of Unbridled Curiosity. Given the title of the sermon, I thought it would be fitting to share with y'all a story I recently had with a horse. Last week, I went over to Pisgah Presbyterian Church to see my good friend, Hannah, who will soon be installed as their next pastor. Pisgah Presbyterian Church is located right behind the castle on Versailles Road and could not be in any more quaint of a location. Founded back in the late 1700's, the church buildings sit nestled in a field surrounded by a very old cemetery and horse farms.

As I pulled up in my car, I parked next to a fenced in area containing several horses. One of the horses, a mare, seemed particularly curious of me and stepped up to the fence. I reciprocated with my sense of curiosity and stepped up to greet her. She seemed enamored with me and began sniffing me and lowering her face so that I could pet her. I giggled and said, "hello there." She seemed particularly fascinated by my hands and started to lick and gently nibble them. Which was when I remembered that just before exiting the car I had applied some lavender Bath and Body Works hand sanitizer to my hands. The mare was clearly quite a fan of the smell and taste. I laughed as she licked my hand with her massive tongue and huffed in appreciation.

But our lovely moment was soon brought to a traumatic end when the mare promptly sneezed directly on my face. I don't know if you've ever had the experience of being sneezed on by a horse but, let me tell you, it was a LOT of phlegm! I stood in stunned silence for a moment when I heard laughter from behind me. My friend, Hannah, had arrived just in time to see the hilarious scene. As I began to wipe off my face and clean my

glasses, I understood that curiosity had gotten the best of me and had taught me that while horses appreciate the small and the taste, Bath and Body Works' lavender hand sanitizer will cause a horse to sneeze violently in your face.

Curiosity is the birthplace of learning, growth, and innovation. Sociologically speaking, curiosity is the birthplace of religion. Why are we here? Where do we come from? What is the meaning and of life? What happens when we die? Without the innate curiosity of these human questions, there would be no religion. And yet, here we are, asking these questions still after many millennia. Curiosity is what makes us human.

And, even more specifically, curiosity is the root of those of us in the Reformed tradition. The Reformation began in the 1500's when theologians such as Martin Luther became increasingly frustrated by the Catholic Church's opposition to the curiosity of its congregants. The leaders of the Protestant Reformation sought to create a version of Christianity that encouraged curiosity instead of oppressing it.

And so, more than five hundred years later, here we are continuing this theological tradition of curiosity. Even if it means that every once in awhile it gets us in situations where a horse might sneeze on our face.

Today's passage comes to us from the first chapter of the Gospel of John, as John the Baptist sees for the first time the man that he has been proclaiming in the wilderness for all those years. John the Baptist has been preparing the way for Jesus Christ and now is the time. And John doesn't miss a beat. His prophetic curiosity leads him to identify Jesus immediately.

"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

The next day, John is standing with two of his disciples and Jesus yet again walks by. Again, John points to Jesus and says, "Look, here is the lamb of God!" Then, curiosity gets the best of his disciples. The safer option would have been for them to remain with John the Baptist. I imagine they've gotten used to the routine of being a disciple of John the Baptist. Wake up. Head to the river. Preach about the coming Christ. Baptize folks in his name. Maybe call some passing Pharisees a brood vipers. Go home. Sleep. Wake up. Repeat.

But, they choose the other option. They leave their status quo and are led by curiosity to follow this man that John the Baptist has been telling them about all these years. They follow him for a while before Jesus senses their presence and turns around to face them. After their brief interaction, their journey begins and curiosity has officially gotten the better of them.

The disciples could have stayed put. But instead they took a chance. A dangerous one. They took a chance that was fraught with risk because the Holy Spirit stirred up within them a sense of curiosity about what God was doing in their lives.

Curiosity is the first step of living a life of faith.

You see, when we exercise curiosity, it communicates at least two things:

First of all, to be curious is to admit that we don't have all the answers. If we were all knowing, then there would be no need for curiosity.

Secondly, to be curious is to admit that God is still creating and that there is always more to learn about ourselves, our world, and each other.

Curiosity is an act of faith because it's what makes space for the Spirit to move.

Beaumont Presbyterian Church would not exist if it weren't for the curiosity of members of Second Presbyterian Church who wondered what might happen if they planted a church here on the west end of Lexington.

The hymns that we sing would never have been written had it not been for the curiosity of the hymn writers, wondering what would happen if they combined theology with music.

The liturgical art that hangs around this sanctuary would never have been created without the curiosity of those who worked on them.

And those acts of curiosity extend far beyond the story of this church:

Tomorrow, we'll observe Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Martin Luther King was a brilliant practitioner of curiosity because he and the other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement had the curiosity to imagine a world in which people were not treated differently because of the color of their skin. But the Civil Rights Movement gave us another truth about curiosity: curiosity is risky work.

The disciples who began to follow Jesus in today's passage did not embark on a journey of convenience and comfort. Rather, their curiosity led them on a path to challenge the economic and cultural norms of that day. And, therefore, they met resistance. Their work was not welcomed by those who benefited by keeping the world as it was. But the work of the Church is prophetic curiosity that challenges such structures.

And that work continues to this day in the Church.

We, as a church, are at a place where we need to have an innate sense of curiosity in order that we might give the Spirit some wiggle room to work among us. Maybe the best gift we can give God, and one another, is to remain curious.

Because only the curious have something to find.

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God's children, say: **Amen.**