

**LET'S TAKE A WALK**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY – JANUARY 19, 2020**  
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What are you looking for? This is THE human question.

At one level or another, every person I know or know of is looking for something.

Hungry people are looking for food,  
endangered people are looking for safety,  
suffering people are looking for comfort,  
lonely people are looking for companionship.

In our psalm today, a person near death is looking for God to restore life.

In the reading from Acts, foreigners have been looking for faith.

In the gospel reading, John, Andrew and another disciple  
were looking for the Messiah of Israel.

How wonderful that at the same time, Isaiah tells us that God, too, is looking:

God is looking for the entirety of humanity, all the nations to the end of the earth.

Now, I'd think that if we're basically all looking for the same thing, we'd have found each other by now.

Needless to say, that has not happened. Why not?

The clue comes from the reading from Acts.

In the Book of Acts, James is the head of a council of leaders  
in the brand-new Christian church in Jerusalem.

At this point in the life of the church, nearly 100% of the Christians in Jerusalem were Jewish.

But outside Jerusalem, it was a different story.

Paul had been gadding about the middle east preaching not only to Jews but to  
heathens, pagans and other assorted riff-raff about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus,  
and how they were included in God's grace. He *baptized* these people. Shocking.

And, more to the point, it was against the rules.

The rules.

For 5,000 years, humanity has found the need for rules to organize our common life.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that no person, not even a king, is above the law is a hallmark of true civilization.

It's a very good thing.

BUT, ideals and practice have a way of getting muddled.

With systems of rules, sooner or later the rules start favoring one side over another.

Israel went from ten basic commandments anyone could agree with  
to 613 Mosaic laws<sup>2</sup> that gave Israel its identity: those who followed them were IN,  
and their demanding stringency kept the riff-raff OUT.

Indeed, the very gate of the mighty Temple in Jerusalem had this inscription:

*No other-born [a foreigner, a non-Jew] is to enter the Temple upon penalty of death.*

But there's Paul, baptizing the non-Jewish foreign riff-raff

and claiming they are equal before God with the law-following Jewish Christians. This will not do.

One side wants a new rule: before anyone can become a Christian,  
they must become Jews, be circumcised, commit to follow all those rules.

The other side thinks making Gentiles follow the rules empties the Cross of Christ of its power.

To settle matters, there's a hearing before the elders. (We're having a hearing in our country right now.

As I have said so many times: today's headlines in a 2,000-year-old book.)



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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code\\_of\\_Ur-Nammu#Content](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_of_Ur-Nammu#Content)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613\\_commandments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613_commandments)

James, the chief elder, listens to one side, to Paul and Barnabas, talk about signs and wonders, about how the power of God's Holy Spirit is present in their work among the riff-raff.

James also listens to the other side, accusers who complain that signs and wonders or not, everyone needs to follow all the rules because they were instituted by Moses, and are the essence of belonging to God's chosen people.

James then listens to Peter, the rock on which the church is built, ("Cephas" is an Aramaic word, and "Peter" is a Greek word; both mean "rock") who, as we heard last week in Acts 10:34-43, said God shows no partiality of one group over another.

Both have their merits, both were valid ways of being Christians. This was a third side. James also reads his Bible, the same one with those hundreds of laws but also with the promises of the prophets, and he finds this gem from the prophet Amos, who said almost 800 before Jesus was born that *all the Gentiles belong to God*.

Plus, I suspect, James looked at the life of Jesus, a life he knew first hand.

He remembered how Jesus had all kinds of disciples, fishermen and businessmen, patriots and revolutionaries, hotheads and poets, men and women.

These things together persuade James that "all Gentiles" means "all."

James goes for the third side and blows the doors off of the tidy private club of the church in Jerusalem.

James declares: *Don't create problems for Gentiles who turn to God.*

Another way of translating this is: *Don't cause trouble for others who are seeking God.*

Paul picks up his staff and goes for a walk, one that took him all over the known world of that time, to tell those outsiders that God is seeking them

to give them life, hope, and healing – in other words, salvation.

James' wise decision brought peace at first, but humans are funny.

We keep wanting to create rules and shut those church doors.

Why? because we are afraid of people who are different from us.

We fear the unknown. We want to know who is IN and who is OUT.

We want to feel safe more than we want to share God's grace.

It's not just Christians who do this, of course. Almost all cultures teach stranger danger.

We could chalk it up to human nature, but it's more accurate to chalk it up to human sinfulness, an attribute shared by those of all religions, and none.

That's why we need to read very closely what John the Baptist says in our gospel reading:

when John sees Jesus, he exclaims, *Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"

Not the SINS of the world, all those selfish, destructive, and stupid things that individuals do to themselves, each other and creation.

The SIN of the world: all that separates humanity from God, all that is broken, captive, sick, and unloving in all cultures and places.

Jesus is taking the brokenness away from the whole world, not just from those who say the right words or belong to the right club, but The. Whole World.

This is the good news of Jesus Christ: that God is crazy about the World, that God is taking the sin of the world away, healing and restoring it; that nothing we do can stop it, because God's love, life and purpose are way more potent than our hate, violence and selfishness.

We can't stop God, BUT time and time again Jesus says we can join God's work.

How? I'd like to part of a video about a way to wage peace,

from a TED talk by William Ury. This video changed my life about 5 years ago.

Margaret Bowman from this parish showed it to our Vestry.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/william\\_ury\\_the\\_walk\\_from\\_no\\_to\\_yes](https://www.ted.com/talks/william_ury_the_walk_from_no_to_yes)

We can step away from the mindset that the people on one side are IN: beloved and privileged and right, and the people on the other side are OUT: damned, losers and wrong, and go to a third side, where we seek to join God’s work and stop causing troubles and problems for others, and instead, like Jesus, wage the peace of God in a broken world.

5 years ago, after seeing this video, the Church of the Good Shepherd spearheaded the very first United Faiths Walk of Peace.

The Mission of the Peace Walk is to take the third side:

**Mission Statement:**  
The Mission of the United Faiths Walk of Peace is to promote peace, justice, and mutual respect by bringing the faith communities of a region together for fellowship, dialogue, and increased knowledge of each other’s faith beliefs.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Walk of Peace will be, God willing, next Sunday.



Park at Our Lady of Lourdes on San Salvador and walk down to the mosque at 1218 New York Ave., off State Route 580

**2020 UNITED FAITHS WALK OF PEACE**

**SUGGESTED PARKING**  
Grass lot at Our Lady of Lourdes on San Salvador Dr. between San Helen Drive and Bass Blvd.

**GATHER for Service Project: Masjid Al Salaam**  
1218 New York Ave. 2:00 – 3:00 pm

- Opportunity to tour the mosque
- Service Project: create homeless emergency kits

**WALK TO: Joseph Cephas Weaver Park**  
3:00 – 3:30 pm

**DRUM: African Drum Circle!**  
3:30 – 5:00 pm

- Drums are provided, and some chairs
- Drum Circle leaders are professional drummers.

We’ll have a service project of making homeless emergency kits, then walk together to Weaver Park for a professionally run African Drum Circle.

The mission of the Peace Walk is consistent with this parish is all about, or we wouldn’t be doing it. To remind you, this is our Mission and Vision statement:

**We Aspire**  
TO LIVE IN A WORLD  
WHERE ALL  
CREATION  
THRIVES  
IN GOD’S LOVE.

**We Seek**  
TO BECOME WHO GOD  
CREATED US TO BE BY  
WORSHIPPING JOYFULLY,  
RESPECTING ALL,  
SHARING GENEROUSLY,  
AND  
NURTURING EVERY  
SPIRIT.

Episcopal Church of the  
**GOOD SHEPHERD**

The ultimate religious question for all people everywhere  
is the question Jesus himself asks you and me:

*What are you looking for?*

As those who say we already have found the Messiah, the Christ,  
we are not looking for him, but we are looking for ways to join him and all the prophets  
in being a light to the nations so that God's life, hope, and healing – God's salvation –  
reaches the end of the earth.

What a sign and wonder it is that God can work good in us,  
that we can take the first step toward God's salvation  
simply by taking a walk right here in Delightful Dunedin!

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#### **COLLECT OF THE DAY:**

Holy God, our strength and our redeemer, by your Spirit hold us forever, that through your grace we may worship you and faithfully serve you, follow you and joyfully find you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

#### **ISAIAH 49:1-7**

Listen to me, coastlands; pay attention, peoples far away. The Lord called me before my birth, called my name when I was in my mother's womb. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, and hid me in the shadow of God's own hand. He made me a sharpened arrow, and concealed me in God's quiver, saying to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I show my glory."

But I said, "I have wearied myself in vain. I have used up my strength for nothing." Nevertheless, the Lord will grant me justice; my reward is with my God. And now the Lord has decided—the one who formed me from the womb as his servant—to restore Jacob to God, so that Israel might return to him. Moreover, I'm honored in the Lord's eyes; my God has become my strength.

He said: It is not enough, since you are my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the survivors of Israel. Hence, I will also appoint you as light to the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. The Lord, redeemer of Israel and its holy one, says to one despised, rejected by nations, to the slave of rulers: Kings will see and stand up; commanders will bow down on account of the Lord, who is faithful, the holy one of Israel, who has chosen you.

#### **PSALM 40:1-12**

I waited patiently upon the LORD; he stooped to me and heard my cry.

**He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay;  
he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.**

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;  
many shall see, and stand in awe, and put their trust in the LORD.

**Happy are they who trust in the LORD! they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.**

Great things are they that you have done, O LORD my God! how great your wonders and your plans for us!  
there is none who can be compared with you.

**Oh, that I could make them known and tell them! but they are more than I can count.**

In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure (you have given me ears to hear you);

**Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, and so I said, "Behold, I come.**

In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: I love to do your will, O my God; your law is deep in my heart."

**I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation;**

**behold, I did not restrain my lips; and that, O LORD, you know.**

Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance;  
I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the great congregation.

**You are the LORD; do not withhold your compassion from me;  
let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever.**

**ACTS 15:12-19**

The entire assembly fell quiet as they listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through their activity. When Barnabas and Paul also fell silent, James responded, "Fellow believers, listen to me. Simon reported how, in his kindness, God came to the Gentiles in the first place, to raise up from them a people of God. The prophets' words agree with this; as it is written,

*After this I will return, and I will rebuild David's fallen tent; I will rebuild what has been torn down. I will restore it so that the rest of humanity will seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who belong to me. The Lord says this, the one who does these things, known from earliest times.*

"Therefore, I conclude that we shouldn't create problems for Gentiles who turn to God."

**JOHN 1:29-42**

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one about whom I said, 'He who comes after me is really greater than me because he existed before me.' Even I didn't recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be made known to Israel." John testified, "I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and it rested on him. Even I didn't recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and testified that this one is God's Son." The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus walking along he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, "What are you looking for?"

They said, "Rabbi (which is translated Teacher), where are you staying?"

He replied, "Come and see." So they went 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 disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Christ). He led him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

**SERMON HYMN: *Blessèd Jesus, at Thy Word***

*Blessèd Jesus, at thy word we are gathered all to hear thee;  
let our hearts and souls be stirred now to seek and love and fear thee;  
by thy teachings pure and holy, drawn from earth to love thee solely.*

*All our knowledge, sense and sight lie in deepest darkness shrouded,  
till thy Spirit breaks our night with the beams of truth unclouded;  
thou alone to God canst win us; thou must work all good within us.*

*Glorious Lord, thyself impart! Light of Light, from God proceeding,  
open thou our ears and heart, help us by thy Spirit's pleading.  
Hear the cry thy Church upraises; hear, and bless our prayers and praises.*

**BLESSING:**

The Wisdom of God, the Love of God, and the Grace of God strengthen you to have the faith, heart, and hands of Christ in this world, as you go from here blessed in the name of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.