

“CONVERSION”

John 1:36-38

19

2 Epiphany
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Emmanuel Church
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Staunton VA

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?”

This coming Saturday, January 25, is the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. Paul is a favorite of mine. I am drawn especially by his courage and his way with words. It was his mouth, after all, which frequently got him in trouble. I relate to that.

Today’s gospel reading tells us of a conversion earlier than Paul’s. That is Andrew’s.

Many prophets are around during the lifetime of Jesus, one on every street corner it seems. John is one of them, and we learn in today’s gospel that Andrew is with John when Jesus happens to walk by. Andrew is referred to as John’s disciple, his follower. John says, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

Boom, Andrew and another unnamed disciple leave John and start following Jesus. Jesus sees them, and asks, “What are you looking for?” Andrew could be called the first evangelist, as his next act is to find his brother Simon, and tell him, “We have found the Messiah.” He literally brings him to Jesus.

I am an Episcopalian from my mother’s womb, and I have never been tempted by any other religious faith. But I also believe life, for me and for you, is a series of conversions. I have converted from one passion to another a number of times—authors, sports, music, movies, friends, favorite saints, emphasis on individual persons of the Trinity: sometimes it’s Creator, sometimes Jesus, sometimes the Holy Spirit. It’s hard to give equal attention at the same time to the persons of the Trinity.

Life is a journey. If things aren’t changing, if you aren’t frequently converted from one thing to another, you are missing out, getting short-changed.

The question we need to ask has, as they say on Antiques Roadshow, impeccable provenance. It is Jesus who asks Andrew, “What are you looking for?”

And the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, one of my personal favorite Sundays—just kidding—comes at a very convenient time, the time when we are just beginning to break our New Year’s resolutions—unless you’re on the fast track and have already given up.

I worked developing some of my goals at a retreat in October, and they include a more regular and disciplined prayer life (check), more frequent exercise (check, not a high bar to exceed in my case), less screen time (meh), writing my memoirs—thanks to a neighbor it’s called “Rumors from the Confessional” (starting to write again); and losing weight (now beginning to happen, but stay tuned), and spending more quality time with Bizzy (somewhat).

“What are you looking for?”

What is missing from your life? What is messy in your life? What is the focus of your 2020 New Year’s resolutions? Do you need conversion? I have some annoying suggestions, which may or may not grab you:

Stop saying I’m not religious, but I am spiritual. Religion is not a bad word. It means what holds us together, what is important, what rules our lives. It often, but not always, includes God. It often, but not always includes the church, but in my view always includes some kind of community.

I grew up in an academic town which even then had all kinds of religious groups. One which caught my eye with a newspaper ad for its weekly gathering was the Ethical Vegetarians. Not only did they eschew the eating of animals for ethical reasons, but they also gathered as a way of keeping focused on other important things.

“... but I am spiritual reminds me of neighbors Bizzy and I had in Charlotte. Their teenage daughter wasn't feeling well, and went to the doctor.

“What's wrong?” he asked.

“I don't know. I've just been feeling kinda bilious”

“What the H is that?!”

“I don't know!”

“What does spiritual mean?!”

“I don't know!”

What might conversion include at this point in our lives?

On with the list: One bold step for some might be to go on a retreat, say at the Benedictine monastery in Berryville. Anyone here done a retreat, there or elsewhere? It is literally a time away, a time for reading, reflection, quiet walks, regular worship, and the opportunity to discuss your goals with a spiritual director.

For some of us disciplined screen fasts would be helpful. Don't keep saying, “Sorry, but I've got to take this.”

Bizzy and I are on an organized diet, developed by the Mayo Clinic. It keeps us more focused than just cutting back on the bad stuff.

Get some more exercise. There's a reason the Y waives the joining fee in January: New Year's Resolutions.

Read through the Bible, cover to cover. Bible 101 is to read through the New Testament. More advanced study begins with Genesis. I once figured this out, but I think it's 11 chapters per day will get you through in 6 months.

Which parts of your life are troublesome? Which parts of your life are satisfying? Where are you stuck doing things that aren't helpful?

Check it out with your spiritual advisor or the rector. If you're desperate, I'm available.

“What are you looking for?”