

Seek and Find
Pentecost 22, Year B
Ps 34:1-3, 8 & 22; Job 42:1-6, 10-17
Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52
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I. Introduction: A Child's Game

As children, we played hide-and-go-seek. We'd giggle nervously as we tore off to find the perfect hiding spot while the child whose turn it was to be "It" closed his or her eyes and counted: "One...two...three..." and then more quickly until: "ready or not, here I come!"

Hide-and-Seek wasn't my favorite game; whereas some kids, like my daughter Ella, love to chase and be chased, I didn't; I preferred running around with not running around from or after, and I hated lying in wait, under the bed perhaps, wondering if "It" would pull up the bed skirt and yell, "Gotcha!"

I didn't want to be "Gotcha-ed!"

But this was only a girl's momentary dread. Some people are in hiding for real, and they are terrified to be gotcha-ed. They know the consequences will be much greater than simply being chosen "it" on the next go around.

II. Hide-and-Seek

A. Hide

I recently read about two women who hide in fear.

The first has been hiding *from her father* for more than a decade after she received death threats from him for renouncing her faith to escape an arranged marriage. She said: "I'm determined to live my life."

The second is also hiding; she lives in poverty in a South African shack made of wood planks, tar paper and tin, and she has AIDS. She is terrified to tell her family, fearing that she'll "disappointed them" and, if they throw her out, have fewer resources than she currently does. Nonetheless, she expresses her desire to stop hiding and to speak out about her condition in order to help others who are also suffering.

Fear is a powerful motivator; whether it's the dread of a young girl playing a game or the terror of women in hiding; fear prompts us to fight or take flight or sometimes both.

B. Seek

The protagonists of today's Bible stories, though surely afraid, chose neither to fight nor to flee. But to stand up for themselves; but they weren't hiding in fear for their lives. As the saying goes, they had "nothing to lose"; the one had already lost everything and the other, a blind beggar, was already relegated to the margins of society. Yet rather than despair or hide out they made themselves clearly and loudly heard.

1. Job

Job, God's faithful servant, has lost everything, including his children and his health; he laments, beats his chest, cries out and confronts his former friends when they come around and tell him he must have done something really awful for God to bring such suffering upon him—some friends! With friends like these, who needs enemies? Job refuses to cow, and insists he's done nothing wrong. *Rain falls on the just and the unjust alike*, the Gospel of Matthew rightly asserts millennia later (5:45).

Not only does Job refuse to hide under the proverbial bed, but he makes himself "It," seeking out God who, interestingly, appears to be the one in hiding! "Oh, that I knew where I might find [God]," Job says, "that I might come even to *his* dwelling. I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments...Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No, but he would give heed to me. There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge" (Job 23:3-4, 6-7).

As we heard in last week's scriptures, God does just this: comes out of hiding and gives heed to Job while refusing to *contend with him*: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" God asks Job, "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:2-4).

Job, in calling God out, demonstrates his faith in God; he believes that if he can just get a word with him and "reason with him" then he'll be acquitted. And isn't that the biblical definition of faith: believing where the eyes cannot see? "Faith is the conviction of things not seen," writes the author of Hebrews (11:1-2).

And yet, how satisfying to see what we have previously been unable to see; to receive confirmation of what was hoped for: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear," Job tells God, as recounted in today's scripture reading, "but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). As such, he is finally able to

make peace with his lot and to repent—not for causing his suffering, for he didn't; but, for having presumed to understand the workings of God.

2. The Blind Man

If faith is the conviction of things not seen, then the blind man in today's gospel story is the epitome of faith, of seeing while literally in the dark:

Jesus and the disciples were ministering in the town of Jericho, and when Bartimaeus, “a blind beggar sitting by the roadside, heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (Mark 10:46-7)

Bartimaeus had faith in Jesus even though he'd never seen him, and so he sought him in the only way he could: by calling out loudly with his voice.

“Many sternly ordered him to be quiet,” Mark tells us (10:48a), but like Job, Bartimaeus was not to be deterred: “He cried out even *more loudly*, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here’” (10:48b-49a).

And this is where I might have started shaking in my boots a bit. Is this going to be the calm before the storm, as God's silence before his billowing speech to Job?

But Jesus' followers know what is coming: compassion; they “call to the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ Throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus” (10:49b-50). This brings tears to my eyes. He's blind, and yet he springs up, not knowing what's immediately in front of him, and goes to Jesus.

Jesus says to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51a). What a seemingly ridiculous question. Anyone could see that the man wanted to regain his sight!

Since Jesus knew this: why did he ask? While we can't presume to know, we can surmise that to make an honest request, free of manipulation or guilt, is in and of itself, faith. When you make a request you can't see the outcome, but you hope, the definition of faith.

We get caught up in whether we have enough faith, as though if we only believed more, or more fervently, we could somehow earn God's favor and heal ourselves or our loved ones. I don't believe this is what Jesus is saying at all.

The blind man seeks out Jesus and tells him straightly and simply: “My teacher, let me see again.”

And here I find myself tear up again. The request implies that once he was able to see, and that now he no longer can. Can you imagine?

As we age we don't see as well, do we? And not just physically. We have trouble seeing as we did when we were young: with hope and faith and enthusiasm. With our eyes firmly focused in the present: in whatever game we were playing or whatever limb we were scraping up. Now we're just thankful if I limbs work at all!

Let me see again.

A friend of mine, upon my ordination, wrote me a wise letter, expressing: "God gives us just enough light to see the path directly ahead; If we could see more, we might not follow him. Trust in God to lead you."

It is into and by the light of God that we walk in faith. Our faith is the hope, even in the midst of doubt, that, to quote fourteenth-century saint, Julian of Norwich: "*All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.*"

I don't know how all manner of thing shall be made well, or whether it will be made well on earth or in heaven, but I have faith, even where I can't see, that it will be.

"Go," Jesus said to the blind man, "your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52a).

3. Us

Pauline shared with me a faith story that speaks to this point:

III. Conclusion: A Christian's Goal

Faith is fundamentally not about Hide-and-Seek but Seek-and-Find.

Today's scriptures call us to come out of hiding, by which I mean only that we are to be authentic. I am not speaking here of people who are *in* hiding from those who would do them harm—they need to stay away from them; I'm simply saying that we serve a God who wants to know us and to be known by us, who listens to and responds to us when we, in faith, like Job and Bartimaeus, call out to God, express our thoughts and feelings, and state our requests clearly, perhaps even loudly, to God.

We're not going to find everything we want, or even need, but the way of peace will be open for us.

Those who "take refuge in God," says today's psalmist, "who taste and see that the Lord is good, [are] at peace" (34:8).

Sounds pretty delicious right about now.