

Seek and Ye Shall Find

There is a very simple line in the preachment of Jesus that has posed a problem for the religious community for some time. Jesus says, “Seek and ye shall find.” When he says that, he is quoting an insight we hear in the prophecy of Jeremiah. In this text, it is rendered that if you search for meaning with all of your heart and soul, you will find meaning. “If with all your heart you truly seek me, you will every surely find me.”

In the New Testament, the text is rendered, “Seek and you shall find,” and Jesus implies that you ought to know what he is talking about. But the text has been personalized to mean that whatever you want you will get, and it has become popularly interpreted as meaning positive thinking. You just seek it and you will have it. You will notice that in the Old Testament, it isn’t just saying, “Seek.” It says, if you seek the Lord.

“Seek and you shall find.” What is being said? If you study the context, you begin to understand that the insight is much larger than your personal positive thinking and your particular need at the moment. The insight is vast. This is a statement about the nature of Life. What is being said is: There is something about the way Life is structured that questing is indigenous to it. The aliveness of Life is best understood in terms of questing. We can translate that very quickly and say, the person in whom there is no active quest is not very alive. Questing, searching, probing, expecting, desiring, hoping – these are indigenous to being alive. The thrust toward meaning is fundamental to all that is living. And to the extent that a part of you is not wrestling with the significance hidden in your life, to that extent you are not alive, even though you might breathe and go to work, come home and take care of your family. There is embedded in Life the thirst for expression. Our tradition says that it is registered, even physiologically registered, and biologically understood as a thirsting principle. It is symbolically experienced by your body as your body celebrates its thirsting – its need for its own fulfillment, for that which is beyond itself.

“Seek and ye shall find.” The extent to which you seek the embedded meanings of life, to that extent you are alive. The text is about the principle of aliveness. Jesus said, you will discover that this is a world that is so alive that it is responsive to your aliveness, it is so alive that it awaits, as it were, your aliveness – it quests your questing. And the religious moment is the moment when your questing and Life’s questing find a point of encounter. That is the basis of religious experience. This religious experience has to do with the revelations flowing from that realization that you and all of what God has done are thirsting and in search of that which is acceptable only in the realm beyond the one in which you now find yourself. Any religious experience, regardless of the name, stands on that ground.

I would like to read from “The Prophet” by Gibran. Here is one of his insights:

“You have given me my deeper thirsting after Life. Surely there is no greater gift than that which turns all ones aims into parched lips, and then turns all Life into a fountain. And in this lies my honor and my reward, that whenever I come to the fountain to drink, I find the living water itself thirsting, and it drinks me while I drink it.”

You have given me parched lips and you have revealed to me that all Life is a possibility to assuage my thirst. I discovered that when I partook of the water of the fountain, it drank me while I drank it. He is saying that I discovered that Life itself is alive. Years before Gibran was born, the Black slaves had the insight. Here is the way the slave said it:

“I went to the rock to hide my face, the rock cried out, no hiding place, no hiding place here.”

Life is alive. I went to the rock, I assumed it was dead, and I was going to hide in my Holy terror of God, in my shame, but the rock said, no, I’m in the same bind.

The message is stated again by Paul. All of Life is writhing and groaning, waiting for the revelation of God. Now the message is the same, whether it is Paul, Gibran or the

slave. Life is alive. And you know the other text: “If you don’t . . . the rocks will.” When they came and told Jesus to stop these people from proclaiming that he was the Messiah, he said, “If I stop them from screaming Hosannahs, then the rocks will cry out.” When we go back and say, “Seek and ye shall find,” Life is questing and will honor your questing because it is caught up itself, as Paul says, in groaning and writhing – in searching for the revelation of God.

What are we talking about? Words like “the revelation of God,” “I want to go to Heaven.” What are we talking about? I want to know the truth about this Life, that is all it is talking about. If you are caught in a hellish earth, then going to heaven is a revelation about what was really intended before people made a hell out of it. If you are talking about salvation, there is not some tricky formula, it is simply the dawning awareness that God’s intention, hidden in Creation, can reveal itself through the creative forms, be they flowers or air or people.

No wonder, then, the ancient insights come: If you search for meaning with all of your soul, so that Life gets the message that you are for real, then you will discover that the rest of Life is caught up in searching, too. And you will find, in the corporateness, the depth, of the searching spirit that wanders this earth – you will find the great mystery of Life, and behind and in that searching spirit, you may discover the Will of Life.

Seek, if you dare, and you will find that Life is alive. How will you know it is alive? You will discover the aliveness in the fact that your questing, your searching, is met with searching. You will find that as you contemplate Life thoroughly, and as you turn aside in your quest (that means you get out of your normal level of questioning) that Life will cross-examine you.

All Revelation is at once Summons. The first thing that happens as you are on the edge of great religious insight is that you sense that you are being called. In our ego-oriented life, it is easy for us to understand this if we translate it in human terms. In the presence of one that you have great feeling for, if you contemplate the person long enough, you have the sense that there is something being called from you. When you get

up in the morning, and the sun is particularly clear, you have a sense that, ah, what is this! Or, as you move along and all of a sudden the gorgeous color catches your eye. What do you mean, it “catches your eye?” It is talking to you. You’ll stop and you will turn, and if you turn aside long enough, you will wonder, “What does such beauty mean?” You will discover that the aliveness of Life questions you.

Now Biblically, that was true of the burning bush experience. Moses was out in the field and he saw the bush and he turned aside and then he heard his name, and he heard God saying, “I have seen oppression and I want you to do something about it, and I need somebody to go and work for me.”

Just so you will understand the breadth of the message this morning, I will give you another text. Isaiah is in the temple. His friend has just died – a friend that he literally worshipped, who was a king. He goes in to pray, bereft of his friend, and he has this amazing experience the Bible tells us about. There is symbolically the cleansing experience where they touch lips with hot coals and then he hears the cherubim and the seraphim and the singing, and he becomes aware of God in a new way. And as soon as he becomes aware of God, what does he hear? He hears a question: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?” That’s Life. Seek for it, and you will find.

The great experiences of Life are those encountering places where we meet another in whose presence we are deeply dealt with. And we discover not only that we need, but that we are needed. And we discover the deep interlocking question of life.

“Seek and ye shall find.” You will find that Life is thoroughly alive. With what? It is alive with a questing reality that always wants to pull you beyond your accommodation that you have made with Life. That is the meaning of beyondness. It is the beyondness – that which is past what we have deemed as possible – that is calling you. Religion is the art of the impossible. You want some water to drink – that’s all. What does it mean when you start drinking the water and it starts going down and you feel in it that the thirst is not assuaged – that the water you are drinking is thirsty? Religion hints always at the impossible – at the unending insistence of Life for full

revelation. Revelation is not just a call, it is always a call and a sending, a summons and a response. One comes away with the encountering places of Life always compelled to do, to be.

“Seek and ye shall find.” Yes, you will find that Life deeply cares for you because Life needs you, because you are a part of the agonized fractured body of Life. It cannot know its whole purpose until you engage it, so it can engage you. Life is hungry and thirsty everywhere. There is an insistence in Life upon fulfillment, and though it is distorted in many ways by the pressures of history and time, it keeps breaking forth in its questing and arguing with the quest level of those who have gone on before. To be alive is not only to seek, but to seek with a consciousness that what you find is that which the world has labeled impossible.

“If with all your heart you truly seek Life, you will ever surely find it.” It is a search for those who are bent upon establishing the impossible in history. Only those so dedicated will make a difference in terms of justice, the increase of mercy, and the increase of righteousness and beauty in this world. Religion says, certainly the Christian tradition says, to use a phrase from Victor Hugo’s writing “Les Miserable,” he says, “Salvation is to inhabit the impossible spot.” Only those whose quest takes them to the edge of what we see as possible, only those count, as Life counts meaning.

“Seek and you will find.” If you seek with all your heart, you will discover how alive and seeking Life is. Your joy will be in knowing that you are a part of an endless searching enterprise, and that you will be at the edge of one of the great mysteries of Life, of your own life. You won’t have to tell people about it. They will get the message when they see you.

The church should be a group of people searching, questing, and seeking, finding, and ecstatic because of it. It should be a group of people being pulled on to new levels of questing, and because of it, it should be joy to the community and to each other. Search for it, until you find it.