

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
The Second Sunday After Epiphany
January 15, 2017
John 1:29-42
The Rev. John P. Carr

The Subtle Call

Last week I heard a story that I will never forget. The Rev. John Newton was in town for a function and was speaking about his book called "Falling into Grace."¹

He told a story from Chapter 6 about a dog. This was no ordinary dog. It was a champion greyhound who raced on the track. This dog had spent his entire professional career chasing the mechanical rabbit around the track and had won lots of money and accolades for his speed.

One day the dog decided to retire. This was confusing to everyone because he had just won his last five races and seemed to love the sport. No one understood why he was retiring. A sports reporter decided to go to the home of the famous greyhound and interview him.

Not only was this dog famous and fast but he could speak English. 😊
The reporter began, "*why'd did you quit? Were you out of steam?*"

"No", the dog replied, "*I still have some racing in me.*"

The reporter pressed, "*Did they treat you badly or something?*"

"No, said the dog. *They treated us like kings as long as we were winning.*"

"*Hmm, I see, then you must be injured.*"

"No," said the greyhound, "*I am physically healthier and stronger than I have ever been.*"

“Well, I don’t understand”, the reporter replied. “You were at the top of your game! Why would you have quit at the top of your game, the height of your career?”

“I quit,”** the dog said, **“the day I realized that what I was chasing was not a real rabbit.

*I spent so much of my life running, running, and running only to discover that **the thing I was chasing wasn’t even real.**”*

The first disciples of Jesus were looking for the real thing. They had seen or heard of false prophets and those who claimed to be the Messiah but now they have found the real thing in Jesus and they know it.

They are John the Baptist’s disciples who witnessed John just the day before, call out when Jesus walked by,

“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 when they were standing with John he called out as Jesus walked by, **“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”** The two disciples heard him say this, **and they followed Jesus.**

They had found the real thing.

They were so excited that one of them, Andrew, found his brother Simon and told him that they had found **THE MESSIAH!** What a tremendous discovery! Israel had been waiting for centuries for the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets and now they were standing in the presence of the long awaited Messiah.

Andrew and the other disciple of John followed Jesus because He is the real thing, He is the Messiah they have been waiting for. Now Simon appears and without introduction Jesus names him Cephas, Peter, (the Rock). Jesus, like a father, named Simon with a new name to identify the role of Peter in what would become Christianity. These three men and John the Baptist were witnesses to the arrival of Jesus the Christ who had come to save Israel.

They were ready for His arrival, they were prepared because they had searched the Law and the Prophets and were followers of John the Baptist. John had said that he was definitely NOT the Messiah but that he was preparing the way. When Jesus appeared, the disciples left John with the only invitation from Jesus being “*come and see*” where I am staying. In other words, **FOLLOW ME**. They did follow Him for the rest of their lives and didn’t turn back.

We are all looking for *the real thing* but we may find ourselves chasing the metaphorical mechanical rabbit. We are chasing the wrong gods, the wrong things. We are chasing after our career, power, money, respect, control, fame, love, and acceptance and controlled by our pride.

At some point in your life you will become tired of chasing the fake rabbit or you will realize that the rabbit is a fake and just stop and think and perhaps pray.

- What am I doing?
- I have exhausted myself in life chasing all the wrong things and now I am running out of time.
- What can I do?
- How can I save myself?
- Well, you may have already done it. You have stopped! You have been trying to do it all *yourself* instead of letting God.

It is God who is chasing you!

You may have read the poem, the “Hound of Heaven”² by Francis Thompson. It is a beautiful piece of poetry that captures the pursuit of mankind by God and man’s futile effort to control his own life, to run from God.

It speaks of God pursuing the man through time, how he ran from God, hid from God, lived life his way but yet he still heard the foot falls of God and the voice of God following him relentlessly. He is pursued through time from his youth to old age by the Hound of Heaven persistently following him.

The last line reflects the problem of not only the poet but of mankind. It describes that when we drive love away from us, we are driving God away from us. We need instead to stop and surrender to the One who loves us. We are all looking for someone to follow who will accept us, someone we can be in relationship with and God is waiting.

Jesus gave us that little invitation to join Him. He said, “*come and see.*” He has loved us since before the beginning of time.

He wants us to step toward him in love and faith and accept the unbelievable grace of God.

When we make the choice to stop running and follow Jesus, then we are turning away from all the rabbits of our world that distract us from Him.

We turn away from the urgent and concentrate on the important.

We abandon control of our lives and give that control to God.

That “following” is a response to a call. It is a response to the love of God for us. Responding can be in an instant but is more likely taken over time.

- We hear things that make us slow down in our rush through life and listen.
- We listen and slow down some more.
- Little by little we slow down in *our search* for God and find that He is right there behind us and has been all the time.

Finally we *will* stop and turn around, putting aside our control of life, *instead* putting all our trust in the grace of God and find that we are able to say in all confidence, humility and love, thank you, thank you for loving me.

Amen

1. Concepts, excerpts, ideas and inspiration for this sermon were derived from, "Falling into Grace" by The Rev. John Newton
2. "The Hound of Heaven" by Francis Thompson