

# LOOK WHERE THE LIGHT IS

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John 1:29-42

January 18, 2009

(THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY)

**There is a God-shaped hole in the center of every person and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ.**

A young Danish preacher said that about a hundred and fifty years ago. And someone else said it before that. Nearly sixteen *hundred* years ago, a bishop -- Augustine was his name -- said it like this. He said, **You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you...**

I've been thinking a lot *about* that this week because of some wedding pictures I found. They were from a big wedding that happened at the church where I grew up -- in the little town of Wayne, West Virginia. And if you've never been to Wayne, or if you blinked, I should tell you that the Methodist Church there is right across the street from the Wayne County jail. So when the bride and groom leave the church where they were just joined together in holy *wedlock* ... that's what they see. They see the jail. There's a message in that, I think. I'm not sure what it is. But ...

Anyway, the bride in this wedding was my first cousin's daughter. Her mother's name is Ann. And you can tell we're first cousins, because we both have this terribly premature gray hair, one dimple, and at *least* one red-headed child. All of which is a sure sign that you're one of us -- one of Pearl and Willie Jones's grandchildren, I mean. And we are.

But, of course, there is the *other* side of the family, too. For me, it's the Nolan clan who came from the shores of County Carlow in Ireland to the hills of County Harlan in Kentucky. A strange place, I thought when I was a boy. People did strange things there. People *were* strange there, I think. They ate something called fried okra and kept mason *jars* full of water in the refrigerator. Well ... I *thought* it was water when I was a kid. But that was the Nolan family. They came from Ireland looking for *something* more. But all they found was Kentucky.

So you see, there is always the other side of the family. And for Mary Ann, the young bride in those wedding pictures, the other side of the family included her grandpa, Jack Ross. The same Jack Ross whose wife sucked the pet canary out of his little cage and into the Hoover when she was cleaning one day.

Jack was a kind and contented sort of man, with a heart of gold. A wonderful man, full of wisdom and warmth. And I've been thinking about him this week. I've been thinking about him a lot. And that may be why I've been thinking of Saint Augustine and that young Danish preacher and the things that they said. Because they were searching for something, I think -- something to fill up that place inside them that longed to be filled. And so was Jack. Jack was searching for something, too. Saint Augustine would say he was looking for God, whether he really knew it or not. Because that's how it is. God made us, you know. And he made us to fit *with* him, to *be* with him, in fact. And our hearts are restless till they rest in him. And that was Jack. That was Jack in a nutshell, I think -- a restless heart searching for God.

Trouble is he didn't know where to find him. Didn't even know he was looking for God. He just knew there was something he needed to find. And for some reason he thought that (whatever it was) it was *out there* somewhere. In the heartland of America. Or California. Or New England. He wasn't sure *where* he would find it. He just knew that whatever it was ... it *couldn't* be here.

So, he became a hobo. Really. He hopped trains and rode them wherever they'd take him. No job. No money. He was just homeless. Went around asking strangers for food and took shelter wherever he could find it. Can you imagine? Not having a place to call home, or never knowing where the next meal would come from? Well ... that's how he lived. Jack was a hobo, a tramp -- a *bum* according to some people. But the truth is he was searching, looking for something to satisfy that *longing* he felt -- that empty, aching place in his heart.

And it took him awhile, but he found it. He did. Though not in the heartland, or out on the prairie. And not in the big cities back east or in *California*, even. But he found it. He found it, he said ... well, he used to tell a little story about it. "It's like this," he'd say.

“You know those wee little screws that keep the glass from falling out of your glasses? Well, I lost one of them. Teeny, tiny little thing it was. You can hardly see them they’re so small. And I lost one of them. It just worked itself loose, I guess. One night I was sitting there in my favorite chair, reading the newspaper,” he said. “And I kept nodding off. And it wasn’t bedtime,” he said. “So I hopped up to get another half a cup of coffee from the kitchen. And when I did,” he said, “my right lens fell right out of my glasses. And it just kind of rolled across the living room carpet. So I grabbed it quick, because I didn’t want the dog to think it was one of his chew toys or something -- something he might like to bury, you know, in the backyard.”

“So I picked it up, quick,” he said. And I started to pop it back into the frame, you know. But I couldn’t,” he said. “Because that little screw was gone. And you know how it is. The lens might as well be in your pocket without that little screw. ‘Cause it just won’t stay put. So I started looking for it,” he said. ““Looked down in the chair and under the cushion. And I looked in my shirt pocket, and in the folds of the newspaper, and I looked over every *inch* of the floor. Got down on my *knees*,” he said, “and combed through the whole carpet with the tips my fingers. But it wasn’t there. I couldn’t find it anywhere,” he said. “Not even in the bottom of my coffee cup,” he said.

So he got up and went back into the kitchen -- “just to think about it,” he said. And while he was sitting there he thought, “Well, maybe I stepped on it and it’s stuck to the bottom of my shoe.” So he sat down at the table and looked at the soles of his shoes. But it wasn’t there. “Ah, but if it was there,” he thought, “maybe it fell off in here, in the kitchen.” So he got down on his hands and knees and started looking over every inch of the kitchen floor.

And *that’s* how Gertie, his wife, found him when she came home from choir practice that evening. Jack was crawling around on the kitchen floor. Down on all fours, mind you. And Gertie said, “Jack, what on earth are you doing?” He said, “I’m looking for something. “Oh,” she said. “What are looking for?” “Oh,” he said, “It’s one of those little screws that keeps your lenses from falling out of your glasses.”

“Oh,” she said. “Did one of your lenses fall out?” “Well, yes,” he said. “It just fell right out.” And she said, “And now you’re trying to find that tiny little screw?” “Yes, dear,” he said, “that’s what I’m trying to do.” And Gertie said, “Well what on earth for?” And Jack said, “Well *because*, Gertie, I need it to hold the lens in my glasses.” And she said, “Well, it didn’t do that *before* did it?” “Well no,” he said, “But I suppose it *did* keep it there for *awhile*.” And she was satisfied -- for the moment, I guess. But a few minutes later, when he still hadn’t found it, she said, “Jack let me help you look for it.” “Well, all right. If that’s what you want,” he said. So she got down on her hands and knees and started looking close-up at the kitchen floor.

And she said, “Jack -- where did you lose it?” “Oh,” he said, “in the living room.” “Well why aren’t we looking in *there*?” she said ... And he couldn’t resist. The man just *lived* for moments like that, I think. So he turned round looked at her through one lens of his glasses and said, “Well that’s simple, Gertie, the light’s better in *here*.”

And *that’s* how he found his heart’s desire, he said, the *one* thing he’d been looking for -- for so many years. “I’d searched all over,” he said, “and was just about ready to give up on life. And then I looked up one night and saw a steeple,” he said. “And it was all lit up. You could see it from all around. And something about it just drew me towards it,” he said. “So I walked up to the church. And I went inside. And I knelt there at the altar. And the Lord and I had a little talk that night,” he said. “And that’s where I found what I needed so much, the *One* thing I’d been looking for all those years. I found it,” he said, “when I started looking where the Light was.”

**You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you ... Or as that young Danish preacher said, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, *There is a God-shaped hole in the heart of every person and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ.***

I wonder sometimes about Andrew, and Peter, and the *other* disciple, whoever he was. I wonder sometimes if they were hoboes. Not that they were homeless, mind you. They weren’t. But I think they were like **spiritual hoboes**, in a way. Restless hearts searching for something to fill that place deep *within* them that just couldn’t be filled.

They were fishermen, you know. Working class people. With families and homes and friends, I'm sure. And who knows? They may have been the church-going type, too -- or the synagogue sort, I suppose it was then. The kind of people, you'd think, who would lead full, productive, meaningful lives. And they did, I'm sure. It's just that there was this longing inside them that wouldn't go away. A restless heart, a God-shaped hole somewhere inside them.

And then they heard this preacher named John. And they became his students -- disciples of John the Baptist, they called him. And they were there with him one day, and one of the people he'd baptized sometime earlier happened to walk by them. And John the Baptizer said, "Look! Here's the Lamb -- the Lamb of God!" And it was as if they looked up, like Jack, and saw a light shining in the darkness. And something about it drew them toward him. So they started following the man. And when Jesus turned around and saw them ... Do you remember what he said? Jesus said, "What are you looking for?" And I'm not sure they knew, really. They said, "Where are you staying? Where is your home?" ... And Jesus said, "Come and see."

Come and see...

And you know the rest of the story. One of the people who followed him that day was Andrew. And the first thing Andrew did (after he met Jesus) was run home and tell Simon, his brother. "We've found him," he said. "We've found the Messiah! God's anointed one!" And Simon went to see him -- decided to look where the Light was, I think you could say. And that Light changed his life. It changed all of them, I think. Because that's where they found what they were looking for, they're heart's desire -- the One who alone could fill that place deep within them that longed to be filled.

**You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you...**

There was a time when the old circuit riders would meet together once a year for the "Methodist Conferences" they called it back then. And they would talk about three things, really. What to preach, how to teach, and what to do. But there was always a fourth question they'd ask, not to the whole group, mind you, but to each other. **"How is it with your soul?"**

We don't do that anymore. It's just not the sort of thing people talk about these days. And in a way, I think, it's a shame that we don't. But there is one pastor I know, who still does this, I think. He doesn't just walk up and say, "How is it with your soul?" But he calls people up, other pastors and friends. Or he'll have a cup of coffee with them just to visit, I guess. And when he does he always opens the door. He'll ask how things are going. And then later in the conversation he'll say, "What about you? How is it with you?" Or sometimes he'll say, "Tell me about your prayer life?" Which is just another way to say what the circuit riders said in the old days. And from what I've seen it's making a difference. In his quiet, gentle and genuine way, he's helping people be Christian. He's reminding us, I think, to take a deeper look at things and bring them into the light of God's love.

So let me ask you, this morning, how is it with you? Do you ever feel like something's missing? Or your life's out of balance somehow? I have a feeling we all feel that way sometimes. Like there's a God-shaped hole somewhere inside us, and we keep trying to stuff it with everything we can get our hands on nearly -- everything from titles and honors and trying to feel important, I guess, to things we can buy or *wish* we could buy. And it's not that any of that's bad, really. It just doesn't fit. It can't fill that place inside us that longs to be filled.

But you know that, don't you? That young Danish preacher, Søren Kierkegaard, said it all, I think -- **There is a God-shaped hole in the heart of every person and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ.** So if you ever feel out of balance or as if something's missing inside, try looking where the Light is. For that's where you'll find the One, the only One, who can fill that place in your life. Look where the Light is. Come and see, says Jesus. Come and see. **L**

Not too long ago a man was walking along the East River promenade in New York. And it was dark. Oh, it was dark in so many ways for this man. His name was Christopher Loch. And he was discouraged. Depressed to the point of despair. He was a writer, an author and he had even received a few awards for his writing over the years. And a good bit of wealth, too, I think. But for some reason it just didn't *mean* anything (to him). The truth is he felt empty and lonely ... even worthless, at times, as if his life didn't matter.

And now he just couldn't see how he could go on. The world would be better without him, he thought. And that's what he wanted -- he just wanted to die. And he was ready to do it, right then and there. He was ready to climb over the railing and just throw himself into the river. Because his life and his heart were so empty he just couldn't bear it anymore.

And he stood there staring down at the water, trying to muster up enough courage to do this thing he had come there to do. But as he was staring into the water, he heard a voice. It was the voice of a young woman. And she walked right up to him and said, "Excuse me. I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but aren't you Christopher Loch, the writer?" And he nodded, hoping she'd go away. But she didn't. She said, "I hope you don't mind me just walking up to you like this, but I just had to tell you what a difference your books have made in my life. You've helped me more than you could ever imagine," she said. "And I just wanted to say thanks."

When she said that *something* happened, he said. It was as if there was a little glimmer of light in his darkness. And he held out his hand and said, "Thank you. Really. I should thank you." And he turned around and started for home. And on the way home, he saw a church -- an old stone church he must've passed a hundred times. But for some reason it stood out that night. He could see the belfry bathed in light. And that light and the little glimmer of light that the young woman had given him, drew him inside.

And inside the church, he knelt at the altar and the tears flowed freely. And it just so happened that one of the pastors was there -- a white-haired old gentleman in black with a snow white collar. And he knelt beside him and they prayed together. And he went back there on Sunday, and again the next Sunday and the next. And it was there, I think, that he found his heart's deepest desire. The One -- the *only* One who could begin to fill that place deep inside that longed to be filled. ✕

But what about you? How is it with you? What are you looking for in your life? In your faith? In your relationship with the people around you? Whatever it is you think you've lost? Whatever it is you need to find? Jesus invites you to "look where the Light is." And come see where he lives.

This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

# Soli Deo Gloria

Benen, OblSB

