

**Gen. 17:1-7,15-6**

**Ps. 22:22-30**

**Ro. 4:13-25**

**Mk. 8:31-38**

In the name of God,  
Who seeks us and calls us by name,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

I spied the man as I rounded the bend on the river trail.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"Gold", he answered.

He was poking around the bushes with a stick,

Whistling, as if hunting for something he might have lost.

"Gold!" the sprightly senior retorted again, smirking  
and with a belly laugh that hinted of Gaelic.

He might have been a leprechaun

but there was no sign of a rainbow arching overhead.

I told him, "Good luck with that!"

He laughed out loud again as we parted.

Our encounter caused me to wonder...

what was *I* searching for?

It's doubtful that Abram was searching  
for close encounters with God,  
nor expecting multiple covenants proffered by the Lord;  
if one pokes around the nearby scriptures  
of today's OT reading, like my leprechaun friend.

Like the bend in the river,  
It's doubtful that Abram was expecting his life to take a turn  
when the Lord gives him a new name and identity - Abraham.

Or consider Moses, on the day he witnessed  
a burning bush not consumed by flame.  
Who knows why he had taken the flock farther than usual  
and ended up in *that* place –  
*the* place where God was apparently *waiting* for Moses.  
Was it a nudge? An inkling?  
A feeling to go *here* - rather than over *there*?

Folk singer David Wilcox relates to that feeling  
of being nudged or guided, led this way instead of that.  
Before he performs his song "How did you find me here?"  
live at the Rocky Mt. Folk Festival in 1995, he reflects,

“You know when you’re travelling  
and you come to an intersection  
and that ‘little thing’ says you should...  
you should *try* turning left  
and you say, ‘how do you know?  
It looks good over there.  
I could go left or right  
and this ‘little thing’ says, ‘GO LEFT!’  
And you say, ‘OKAY!’  
And you just imagine and you trust it.  
Then amazing coincidences happen.”

As he puts it, “Eventually I started calling it  
‘the mysterious travelling companion’  
before I had any other word for it.”  
And in his gratitude for being found  
he calls this “a thank-you song.”

But what impact would the ‘little thing’,  
‘the mysterious travelling companion’,  
the Holy Spirit, the great ‘I AM’ have  
without Moses’ ***willingness***  
to look deeply into the burning bush?

God is like my leprechaun friend,  
poking around the bushes, seeking more than Gold,  
seeking us.

**Willingness**, *our* willingness,  
opens up the possibility of God *finding* us!

I'd like to tell you a parable about **Willingness**:

**Willingness** saw the stranger,  
approaching with a lavishly decorated box.  
It was gorgeous and beautiful.

**Willingness** really wanted to open the box.  
Then she heard a voice that she didn't recognize.  
Stranger beckoned with arms outstretched,  
"Come closer, take this special gift I have for you."

**Willingness** remembered the warnings learned growing  
up, never accept gifts from those whom you don't know.  
"You'll really like it!" urged the stranger.  
Reluctantly, **Willingness** walked away.

Further on down the road, she spied a plain,  
unadorned box and wondered why it was there.  
Then she heard a voice calling,  
"**Willingness**, come here, come closer."

**Willingness** knew *this* voice!

This voice of The One  
whom **Willingness** loved and trusted,  
The One to whom Willingness belonged.

The Voice called again, "What are you waiting for?  
Open the box and find out what awaits you inside!"

**Willingness** joyfully accepted the gift  
because she *knew* that all *good* gifts  
come from our loving God.

The interesting thing about **willingness**,  
is that she or he isn't afraid  
to open doors, windows, *or even gift boxes for that matter;*  
*when The One who offers them is The Voice of Love.*

Those openings take us to new places,  
inviting us to experience the *mystery*.  
Sometimes they even lead us right back  
to where we started from,  
but discover a new way to re-experience it.

The question might not be so much –  
“What am *I* searching for?”

More to the point, it may be:

Am *I willing* to be found by God?

Am *I willing* to step off my pre-planned trail,

And like Abraham, or Moses, or Peter,

to get right up into that burning bush and really *look* into it.

As an artist, I use a Viewfinder (*holds up the device*)

when I'm looking around for a good scene to paint.

When *willing*, it's possible to see through *God's Viewfinder*  
the possibilities that on our own, we cannot.

When I say **Here I am!** God replies **I Am, that I am.**

While community is a critical ingredient in keeping the faith,

it is made up of *individuals willing*

to walk along that trail of the faith journey,

where the building of the community begins.

What if Mary hadn't been *willing* to be the God Bearer?

Where would we be if Jesus hadn't been *willing*

to drink the cup that God would not take away?

(Matthew 26:42)

*What is it* that we are *willing*

when we drink from the chalice?

What happens when we become **willing**  
to admit that God has the power, not us?  
What happens when we become **willing**  
to depend on God, and not ourselves?

If **willingness** is the key that opens the door to God,  
**self-will** is the broken lock that needs repair.

In today's Gospel reading,  
Peter's **self-will** earns him a strong reprimand from Jesus.  
Jesus puts it to his disciples in no uncertain terms,  
"If any want to become my followers,  
let them deny themselves  
and take up their cross and follow me.  
For those who want to save their life will lose it,  
and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

We are asked to hand over our **self-will** for **God's-will**.  
We learn to follow God's lead in our lives;  
to bear on our shoulders, with God's help,  
the responsibility to effect change  
striving for the Kingdom of God.

Fear twists 'losing' *self-will* into losing identity.  
The lower case 's'elf fears disappearing,  
because the ego doesn't want to die!  
But only as Self disappears  
does God become more clearly manifested in our lives.  
The gospels are very clear, we die to 'self' to live in Christ,  
where our true Self resides.

What are you searching for, gold?  
Something more valuable than gold – *willingness*?  
May we set our minds not on human things, but divine.  
*Amen*

Amma Susan+