

You're probably familiar with phrase, "The elephant in the room?" Something that's so obvious, everyone knows it's there, but no one is really quite sure how to say it. "The elephant in the room." Well, last May, my cousin was married in Montana. I was able to fly out there to be a part of the wedding. He and the bride were married at a lodge in Montana, in a valley between several mountains. It was about an hour from Yellowstone. It had all kinds of wildlife.

The first day I was out there, I thought I would be adventurous and tour the gift shop (yeah, how adventurous!) and see what sorts of odds and ends they sold. I was walking around, looking at the different artwork they were selling, coffee cups, and T-shirts. And then I came across a T-shirt that had a picture of an elephant with a line through it. It grabbed my attention. It said, "No elephants in the room... only moose." I thought that was pretty odd. I wasn't sure exactly what that might mean.

So, I went to the cashier of this hotel gift shop and asked her, "What's the story behind this shirt?" She looked at me and smirked a little bit. She said, "You're not from around here, are you?" She told me that they had a lot of moose in the area, just wandering around, doing whatever moose like to do. She told me moose are not very nice creatures. She warned me not to go wandering off too far.

And then she said, about once a month or so, there's inevitably a case where a moose will somehow break into the lodge and will get into people's rooms, knocking things over, causing all sorts of problems. She told me stories of people who were just trying to have a nice vacation and it turned out to be the worst experience of their lives because of a moose attack in their hotel room, people who were traumatized because of a moose attack. Honestly, I think she was just trying to scare me. But it worked! Every time I would go into my room in the hotel after that, I would put my ear to the door first, checking if I could hear any moose-like noises. I'd cautiously enter into the room, looking for any signs of any moose anywhere... or any other animal for that matter. Thankfully, there were no moose that had broken into my room or anyone else's room.

I think the cashier at the gift shop was probably yanking my chain. A little Montana sense of humor, I guess. But who knows, maybe there's a moose in that gift shop right now scaring the tar out of everyone!

Wildlife. The elephant in the room. Or the moose in the room. Whichever you prefer. There's one of them in the room in our reading from John this morning. John the Baptist sees Jesus walking by. And John tells two of his disciples, "Look! Here is the Lamb of God!" What's the elephant in the room? Or, moose? It's time to go. John knows it. These two disciples of John know it. It's obvious. John's been talking to his disciples about the Lamb of God all the time. And now, here he is. These two disciples of John know it's time to go and become disciples of the Messiah. It's time for a change.

Without a word, these two disciples of John go to Jesus. And they become Jesus' disciples. It doesn't say it in our text, but I picture them running to him. I see them dashing to where he is in a matter of seconds. Jesus sees them coming to him and he asks these two disciples, "What are you looking for?" The disciples' answer? Well, they don't really give one. They answer the question with another question. "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Maybe they

weren't exactly sure what they were looking for. Maybe they were just relying on their instincts, knowing they needed to be wherever Jesus was. Maybe they just wanted to be set free, and live the "wild-life" of what the Messiah had prepared for them.

I have a theory. It's just a theory. It's nothing that can be proven. But, our reading from John gives the name of one of these two disciples. Andrew is his name. The other disciple? John (the author of the Gospel, not the Baptist) doesn't name the other disciple. And that's something of a consistent thread throughout John's Gospel. If you know of the "Beloved Disciple" in John's Gospel, you know that he's never given a name for some reason either. John, for some reason, likes to leave some of these disciples nameless and faceless at certain points in his Gospel. Scholars debate and debate who these nameless and faceless disciples might be. But I have a theory. I think John (the author) leaves some of these disciples without names for a reason at certain points in his Gospel. I think John invites us to put our own selves in that disciple's shoes at that point. He invites us to be that disciple who goes unnamed. John invites us to crop our own moose-head on top of this mysterious second disciple in our reading this morning. That disciple suddenly has a name. That disciple is you. That disciple is me.

It's just a theory, but I think John invites us to insert our own selves right next to Andrew, right next to Jesus, following Jesus in this scene from John. And that means Jesus' question to these two disciples is also for you. "What are you looking for?" Maybe you're not sure what you're looking for. Maybe you're relying on your instincts for being here this morning. So, you look to the "Andrews" of your life. You look to your neighbor. You look to your companion. You look to your friend. And you both realize that you hadn't heard that question posed to you in a loving way in a long, long time. It's not a scathing, "What are *you* looking for?!" It's a warm, "What are you *looking* for?" Are you looking for strength? Maybe there isn't much strength left. Are you looking for someone to make sense out of a muddy situation? Maybe it couldn't get much muddier. Are you looking for someone to set you free? Maybe you're trapped in a dark place.

If John invites us to hear Jesus' question "What are you looking for?" addressed to us, then he also invites us to answer that question with another question. "Teacher, where are you staying?" That's the question on our lips. Lord, where are you staying? "I've heard, that's where there is strength." "I've heard, that's where peace is discovered in midst any muddy situation." "I've heard, that's where we are set free, to be let loose into the wild... the wild-life in Christ." "Lord, where are you staying?"

If you'd let me, I'd like to name the elephant in the room this morning... or moose... where is Jesus staying? You know where he's staying. It's probably obvious. He's staying with the one who is victimized. He's staying with the one who is broken. Not leaving either. He's staying with the one who is begging for forgiveness. He's staying with the one who has experienced little or no forgiveness in his or her entire life. He's staying with the one who has compassion. He's staying with the one who is in need of someone who has compassion. He's staying with the one who has a generous heart. He's staying with the one who is in need of someone generous. He's staying with the one who loves their family. He's staying with the one who is desperately in need of a family. He's staying with the one who loves their neighbor. He's staying with the one who loves their enemy. He's staying with the one who is hungry and thirsty. He's staying with the one who would feed that hunger and quench that thirst. He's staying with the one next to us. And He's staying with a certain disciple next to Andrew, and that is you. We have a wild God who calls us into a "wild life" with Him. Thanks be to Him. Amen.