

[Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#)

[Psalm 27](#)

[Philippians 3:17-4:1](#)

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

Sermon for March 13 2022

THE SOURCE

By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

Summary: If you had asked me, I would have given you living water.

Most of the sources that shape most of our lives come from outside our control. To take the most obvious ones, none of us has any say in where we're born, what our family circumstances are, whether we're healthy or handicapped, pampered or punished, musically gifted or tone deaf. Whom we become friends with, whom we are influenced and taught by, whom we meet and marry are largely accidents of where and when we happen to be. Had we been somewhere else on that particular occasion, the entire shape of our lives might have been different.

Here's a simple illustration. When I was a senior in high school I was thinking about where I might apply to college. I had good grades and good SAT scores, so I knew I could qualify for just about anyplace, and I knew I wanted to get out of North Dakota, but beyond that, I didn't really have any guidance.

Then one afternoon, I think it was a Sunday afternoon, I turned on the TV and there was a show on called The College Bowl, that I had watched occasionally. It was a quiz show, and on it two different teams of students competed in answering questions. At some point during the show, each team played a little video clip about its college and gave some information about it and said how great it was. The clips were always pictures and videos of the lovely grounds and buildings and of these clean-cut college kids studying on the lawn or rooting for the home team or things along those lines.

On this particular episode, however, when it came time for one of the teams to do its commercial, what they showed was a bunch of long-haired freaky-looking people doing crazy stuff and making funny faces, just being completely goofy and irreverent. And the four contestants from that school themselves didn't look at all like the clean-cut brainy students on the other team, who were from a big-name university like of Duke or Ohio State, or someplace like that.

And the kicker was, the long-haired motley crew from someplace I'd never even heard of just mopped the floor with the team from the big prestigious school. And by the time the show was over, I decided I'd look into this weird place called Reed College, in Portland, Oregon.

Long story short, that's where I ended up going to college. Much longer story even shorter, if I hadn't gone there, my whole life would have been entirely different, with different people, different places, different accomplishments, different failures. I certainly wouldn't be standing in front of you right now.

And here's my point. It's all because I happened to turn on the TV at a particular time on a particular Sunday afternoon, lo those many years ago. If I had been out mowing the lawns that afternoon, or if my father had been watching something on TV, or if I'd gotten a phone call from a friend when the team from Reed showed their clip, my life would have been completely different.

This is just an example from my life. Any one of you could stand up here and tell about an example from your own life. Any one of you, in fact, if you thought about it, could come up with a thousand examples from your own life. Because the truth is, as we started out saying, the sources that shape much of our lives come by and large from the world outside us.

And this is the time to remind ourselves that there is one source for our lives that is not natural, that instead relies upon and requires a deliberate and voluntary choice, the choice to allow Jesus to be the source, to be the well-spring of our lives. It is always important to remember that Christianity is not a 'nature' religion, nor even a 'natural' religion. Its point is not to pander to our human nature, but rather to transcend our human nature, to transform corrupt and fallen mortal nature into something capable of enjoying eternal life in the presence of perfect goodness and truth. Jesus is our guide out of the natural and into the eternal, But here's what's important: it is always left to us to choose Him to be that guide.

And I think our Gospel reading for this morning illustrates clearly for us the nature of that source that we are invited to choose. It shows us that Jesus must be the source of our guidance, and the source of our strength. So let's read it together.

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

Jesus has brought his three closest disciples up onto a mountain to be alone with him while he prays. What is he praying for? Only a little earlier, Peter has publicly recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and Jesus then immediately announced his intention to turn towards Jerusalem and the Cross. Here on the mountain, he is clearly seeking God's guidance and assurance that what He has chosen is in accordance with his Father's will.

They see that, but what else do they see? In a moment of revelation, they see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. Moses: the great lawgiver of the Jewish nation, and Elijah, its greatest prophet, its greatest spiritual guide. Peter and John and James see their young leader standing on terms of equality with the two greatest civil and spiritual sources of guidance they can even imagine. And what happens then? A cloud descends, and the very voice of God speaks out of it directly to them. And what does God say?

“This is my beloved Son. Hear him.”

What God is saying to them is this: All your lives, you've had these two – Moses and Elijah – as your fundamental sources of guidance through life. They were given to you because of who you are, where you were born, who your people are. And they were good sources, they were reliable sources, they were the servants I sent to provide guidance for your people through the Old Age of the past. But now I've sent my son, and the New Age begins with him. Hear him, listen to him, from this time forth, let him be your guide.

And that's the same choice presented to all of us, if we choose to follow Christ. If you hire a guide for a wilderness expedition, you choose to do what he says. You choose to take what he tells you to take on the journey; you choose to go where he tells you to go; you choose to stop and rest where he tells you to stop and rest.

When Jesus sent his disciples out on their first independent mission, the Bible records his explicit instructions: only take one pair of sandals, one change of clothes, don't take any money, stay in the house of someone who respects God, and

so on. It doesn't really matter what the exact instructions were, because they were specific to a particular historical place and time.

But what mattered is that they were instructions from Jesus, instructions for that particular occasion, for those particular men. And that's the lesson for us as well, particular men and women, in particular circumstances, on particular occasions. What is asked of us is simply to choose the guide, and then put the journey in His hands.

And there's the second lesson for us as well. Having descended from the mountain, Jesus is immediately confronted with a distraught father whose son is apparently suffering from epileptic fits, and Luke records his heart-breaking plea to Jesus in this way:

9:40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.

The lasting and eternal consequences of our actions in this world, however nobly intended, however heroic they might seem to our worldly point of view, are fleeting and irrelevant, from God's point of view, unless they are grounded in and reliant on obedience to Jesus as their motivation.

This is a hard lesson to accept, because our human nature is such that we seek recognition for ourselves as the source of moral credit.

What's always vitally important to remember is that the things that matter in eternity are the particular actions, and the particular motivation of those actions, of individuals – not the consequences of their actions. Extremely good actions in the human way of thinking may have terrible consequences: the human cliché to acknowledge that truism is: The road to hell is paved with good intentions. And conversely, even evil actions can have good consequences. All of that is under God's providence.

But what has weight, in God's judgment, is that actions be based on Jesus, that they find their guidance in the attempt to follow Christ's instruction, and their motivation in their trust in Christ's adequacy.

I sought help from your disciples, the man cries out, and the message to us is perfectly clear. The source of healing, the source of strength, like the source of guidance, is never to be found in the disciples...never to be found in us...but only in Jesus himself.

Our text tells us that at that point, Jesus exclaims: “Oh faithless and perverse generation! How much longer shall I be with you and bear with you?” I take that to mean that Jesus is saying to the people of his immediate surroundings that they have not yet learned that there is no source of guidance to rise above the natural world except for Him; and that there is no source of eternal strength to accomplish the deeds of eternity outside of him. How long will it take to learn that simple lesson? Jesus asked it of his own generation, but he might just as aptly ask it of our own, of each of us.

“If you had asked me, I would have given you the water of eternal life,” Jesus tells the woman at the well in Samaria. “I would have given you eternal guidance; I would have given you eternal strength.”

But you must ask.

And so we ask in prayer this morning, heavenly Father, for the wisdom to recognize our own ignorance, and for the humility to acknowledge our own helplessness. Create in us the hunger and thirst for righteousness, that we may seek it from its one and true eternal source, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.