Sermon, *What is your "Why"*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 5.17.26

Acts 1:6-14
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11
John 17:1-11
Psalm 68:1-10, 33-36

One way to discern that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you is to remember when a message gets repeated. If you hear something from one person, then hear the same thing from someone else, or you'll read it in an email, or see it on TV, or hear it in a song – that's one way to discern if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. There is a shekinah Spirit indwelling in you that picks up on itself – like when the Spirit is speaking through others – and will give you reminders.

This happened to me recently. Well, actually, starting about a year ago… I heard a presentation about "knowing what your why is". The presenter did not explain what "why" meant so I thought it was the letter "Y". But, when I heard it again, I realized the "why" is why you do something, why you get up in the morning, why you care about something. It's your "why". I heard the "why" a couple of weeks ago at the diocesan conference I attended and then yesterday, at a college open house, two of the presenters talked about finding your "why". Okay, so, it's a repeated message so I'd like to talk with you about it.

When a couple meets with me to prepare for a wedding, I always ask this: why do you want to get married? Can you guess the number one answer: "because we love each other." That's great, but it doesn't answer why you need to get married. "Because of kids" or "to buy property" or "to spend the rest of our lives together" – all of those do not require the "why" of marriage. That means the "why" of marriage must be something different. (Hint – it has to do with making a commitment to God and to your family and friends publicly).

Why are you here? Why did you attend church today? What is your why for being here.

I bring this up because St. Peter had a "why" of why he followed Jesus. He left his fishing business and followed Jesus. Why? Although our "why" can evolve over time, Peter knew this man was the Messiah and that Peter had a place, a reason, a "why" to follow and be a part of the movement. Peter had to explain his "why" to his wife. Jesus came over to his house; his mother in law was sick, Jesus took her by the hand and she immediately got up. After dinner and through the early hours of the morning, people brought their sick to Peter's house for healing from Jesus. His wife experienced all of this. Later, she joined the movement and in fact joined Peter as he traveled sharing the good news with others. She came up with her own "why" but it started with Peter's "why".

In Peter's writing to the Church which we read today, he address the "why" of suffering. He said suffering happens. But, if you follow Christ, and suffer for it, you will also be "glad" and "shout for joy" because you are blessed for your faith. Your "why". He then wrote that we are to cast all our anxieties upon Christ because he cares for us. Suffering happens but in Christ, he will restore, support, strengthen and establish those who follow him. Amen!

When I was discovering my “why” of following Christ that lead to a formal discernment committee (to discern if I am being called to Holy Orders), they started to see a repeating pattern in me. One of my “whys” is connecting people to God and to each other. That why has only become stronger within me. After the discernment committee, I headed off to seminary. To get there, in Berkeley California, I had to take the subway called BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit). I was usually with other graduate students at Cal Berkeley. One day, I was surrounded by three chemistry graduate students. They saw I was reading a Bible. They asked “why”. Specifically, they asked why I believe. I told them that I believe there is a Power that connects, pulls, all of us together. It’s a loving Spirit that guides and helps. And, in my tradition, we don’t see things as a coincidence but rather as an action of the Spirit – which is why they were asking me my why. That led us to set down our books and have a conversation about what really matters in life: love and chemistry reactions.

Another aspect of “why” is what is the why of All Angels. Why are we? I think we are a lighthouse. I think we shine a light of Christ, of love, acceptance, peace and forgiveness, into a world that desperately needs to see it. We find peace and connection with one another. That connection changes all our lives for the better. It points us to a better place. And, for many, this is their last church, I am their final pastor. We have the honor and privledge of connecting people with the Spirit within themselves and the Spirit that receives them when their earthly life has concluded. Our why is the a theological and metaphorical why of a lighthouse. We help people navigate the last part of our their journey home.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.