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I understand that a gosling—a baby goose—has an innate, a built-in, frame of reference about how to shape its relationship with its mother—and so with the world. At birth, the gosling knows that it is supposed to follow its mother, imitate her actions, and rely on her for protection. This is how the gosling learns how to grow up to be a goose. However, while it knows all of this, there is one (tiny) thing a gosling doesn't know at birth—it doesn't know what its mother looks like. That bit of information just isn't there. So, during its first twenty four hours of life, a gosling takes the first big, moving thing it sees to be its mother—and attaches to this thing **all** its baby goosie instincts. Usually, and fortunately, the first big, moving thing it sees *is* the momma goose, and all goes well. The baby gosling goes where it needs to go, learns to do what it should do, and grows up to be a healthy, normal goose.

But sometimes it doesn't work that way. Sometimes the very first big, moving thing the gosling sees is something very different—sometimes it is a person, or a duck, or another animal, or even a thing—like a canoe. Never the less, the whole spectrum of this baby goose's in-born attachments affix themselves to this substitute, and off it goes. That's how you get those hilarious spectacles of this little thing all dressed up like a goose, honking like a goose, but waddling along after a racoon or a canoe or something else. This is very bad for the gosling. All the right instincts are there, all the needs for food, protection, and care that any goose has, these are all right there—but when it follows the wrong thing, its life gets all twisted and fouled up; and it may never learn what it is like to be a real goose. What does it profit a goose to follow a canoe? Very little.

We human beings have a couple of things in common with these baby geese.

First of all, I am convinced that part of being human is having a built-in sense of our own need to follow and to worship something outside of ourselves something greater than ourselves. We have a sense of our own incompleteness and we know we need to look somewhere else for that wholeness we do not have. We have a built-in need for God.

The second thing we have in common with that baby goose is that we don't know automatically or instantly what this something outside of ourselves, what God, looks like. We don't know automatically know who or what we are created to follow. We know we gotta follow something; but we have to learn the particulars. And if we don't get that right, we, like a misdirected gosling, can easily go wandering off after the first big, moving thing that lumbers by. The results can be just as funny, and just as tragic, as that poor befuddled gosling, honking like a goose, but following a canoe.

I want to take this bit of barnyard wisdom and use it to talk a little about what's going on in the section from Mark's gospel—Peter's Confession, an event so singular that it has its own Feast Day.

Jesus asks the disciples who they think he is. And Peter, bless his heart, honks just like a goose; he gets it right. "You are the Messiah", he says, the Lord, the one they are to follow. Peter and the others say that Jesus is, if you will, their own mamma goose, the one to whom they are to attach all of their needs and desires for leadership, protection, and direction.

So, Jesus takes Peter and the disciples at their word and begins to lead.

He tells them that what lies ahead is suffering and rejection; pain and death—and only then something greater. This, Jesus said, is the way to life.

And Peter is all over Jesus like white on rice. He hauls Jesus aside and says “No”, this is not the way it’s supposed to be. Now, imagine a baby goose jumping in front of its mother and saying, “Whoa, mom, you’re doing the wrong things here, that’s not the way geese act.” Yeah, Peter’s objection doesn’t make sense. In fact, to say “No, Lord” is a contradiction. Think about it.

Well, Jesus comes back on Peter full force and says to him, “You are not on the side of God, but of men.” In other words, in spite of honking like a goose, Peter is really following something else, he is really following the way that the world—the culture around him and his own good sense—are leading.

After all, the world says that winners don’t suffer, but have it easy. The world says that our lives are our own, and that we should gain as much as we can, and enrich our lives, and never lose them. The world insists that to say ‘No’ to ourselves is to waste our lives. The world says that if we get the right answer, things will go the way we want them to go. That’s what the world says. Everybody knows that—just like everybody in Peter’s day knew that the Messiah would come to make it easy for himself and his followers. Peter, like a misdirected gosling, is just waddling along after the world’s thinking, and the world’s values. All the honking in the world won’t change that.

What Jesus offered then, and what Jesus continues to offer now, is to lead us in a different direction.

When Jesus says, take up your cross and follow me—learn from me and from my life what living is all about—he is asking us to attach to him all those instinctive desires we have for security, direction, meaning and purpose. And to do that for real.

He is asking that we discover from him, and from no one else, and from no where else, what life is really all about. To grow into a full human being takes more than the right words—just like it takes more than honking to become a grown up goose. It matters that we follow the real leader, go where he goes, and learn to live the way he shows us to live.

And that's neither automatic nor easy. To follow Jesus is not to give lip service while really hooking up to the values of the world. It's not to elevate today's common sense to the level of divine teaching. Instead, it has to do with getting behind Jesus—and not blocking his way. It has to do with saying 'No' to self as the highest goal, with picking up a cross, and with losing our lives in love, service and obedience. It has to do with giving Jesus authority over our lives and waiting to see what develops. And that often means we lose the world—after all, you just can't have it both ways.

But the promise is that we gain something greater. The promise is that, if we learn to follow as we were created to follow, if we put our instincts in the right place, then we will gain back our lives, as they were meant to be—full, and whole, and eternal. The promise is that we will grow wonderfully into ourselves and toward God, and fly beyond our furthest visions—and so discover the power of his grace and love, and so help new generations grow, and discover this new life for themselves.