

It's funny how languages change, especially in American English, how new words pop up. Every year the Oxford Dictionary selects a word of the year. This year's word is *post-truth* – an adjective defined as “*relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.*” So be on the lookout for post-truth.

I'm still trying to get used to the word *peeps*, which when I was a kid was a yellow marshmallow chick that came five to a box, but now means your people, your community, your group, which I didn't know when I first heard it. So last year, when a woman said to me, “I got my peeps,” I said, “I love peeps.” I was talking about the yellow marshmallow chicks, but she meant her people, her community, her group. She looked at me and said, “That's what I like about you, Phil. You really love people.” I was thoroughly confused, so went home and talked to Joan about it, who told me the meaning of the word *peeps* had changed. I gotta get out more. So now we have our peeps. You have your peeps. I have my peeps. All God's children have peeps.

I was thinking about Jesus this week, something I've been doing quite a lot of these post-truth days. I was thinking about his peeps, his group, his community, his disciples, and how the first thing Jesus did was get his peeps.

Very first thing. Gospel of Mark. Jesus is born, baptized, tempted in the wilderness, went to Galilee to preach the gospel of God, and something happened, some event, some insight, we don't know. Mark doesn't elaborate, neither does Matthew, Luke or John, but something happened that made Jesus realize he needed community. When did you first realize you needed others? Interestingly, Jesus seemed to give the selection of his community little thought. There's no indication he knew any of his disciples before he met them. He simply said, "Come be with me."

Today, we screen our community. In Friday's issue of *The New York Times*, there was an article describing how people seeking roommates to share the rent payment now want to know the political affiliation of their potential roommate. But there's no indication Jesus gave the criteria for community much thought. He certainly didn't sit them down for an interview, or ask their affiliations, didn't want to know if they were Pharisees or Levites or Sadducees or Romans or Greeks.

His disciples didn't appear to give it much thought before joining him. Mark said, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him." Isn't that interesting? They didn't even ask him who he'd voted for. It's almost as if they believed community was more important than personality. Which was just ridiculous, since everyone knows you can only get along with people who agree with you on everything. What were they thinking?

There is a deficit in the land today. A scarcity.

It isn't a financial deficit. 1,700 people become millionaires each day in the United States.

It's not a deficit of population. 10,829 people will be born in the U.S.A. today. 8 of them will be born in the time it takes me to deliver this message. They're the ones saying, "I wish he'd sit down. It feels like he's been speaking my entire life."

It's not a deficit of creativity. Over a million books are published each year in the U.S. alone. Pictures are painted. Inventions are patented. Songs are written and sung.

But what seems to be diminishing, what appears to be decreasing at a startling rate, is the number of people saying, "Come be with me."

We have a deficit of community.

We are forgetting how to be one with another. How to listen. How to talk. How to walk together through our problems and come out at the end still loving, still caring.

When I was young, I heard it said that anyone can be a saint who lives alone. I wanted to be a saint, so I went to live alone. I believed all my challenges, my temptations, and my failures were the fault of others, and that if I lived alone I could be especially holy. So I moved into an apartment all by myself and for one week was the picture of holiness and sanctity. You'd have been proud of me. I read the Bible every night. Then my brother moved in with me. The first night he took over the television and I wanted to kill him.

The saints aren't the people who are virtuous because they have never been tested. The saints are the ones who have been irritated, who have had to forgive, who have failed, who have been angry, but persist in community because they realize there is no other way to learn and grow.

Avoiding community doesn't make us saints.

Sticking with community when community is difficult is what makes us saints. In those times we learn patience, we learn to speak to others clearly, frankly, lovingly. We learn to listen. We learn to forgive. The guru sitting on the mountaintop in his splendid isolation is an untested saint. We have no idea how such a person would behave in the crucible of community.

Jesus knew this, so said to some others, "Come be with me."

Before he healed his first leper, Jesus found his people.

Before he taught his first lesson, he found his people.

Before he made the blind see, he found his people.

Before he made the deaf hear, he found his people.

If you want your life to be a miracle, you need to find your people.

The only way God can help you, the only way God can teach you, the only way God can bless you, the only way God can strengthen you, is by using someone else. Find your people.