



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST JULY 7, 2024

EZEKIEL 2:1-5; PSALM 123; 2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-10; MARK 6:1-13

TRUST, LET GO, AND GO

Mark 6:1-13 *[Jesus came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.]*

Twelve years ago almost to this day, my husband Stuart and I arrived in Seattle only with what we could fit in a Toyota Prius and an AirBnB reservation. Staying in Atlanta would have afforded the certainty of jobs in healthcare marketing and law, a lower cost of living to actually buying a house, and the support of family and friends in being newly married. But we had a strong sense of coming to this place – of salt water, evergreen and mountains – of making our way together even when we didn't know the way or what would unfold.

In today's gospel, Jesus sends out the disciples with everything they need except for certainty.

The Greek word for sent used here is *apostello* and it means to send out on a commission, it's where we get the word apostle from.

And in today's passage, it is Christ sending the apostles with the authority to represent what he has established in his teaching from village to village.

The disciples' roles up until this point have been largely shadowing Jesus. They have heard his summons and watched him in his healing, forgiving, teaching, eating with saints and sinners, praying, and answering questions with more questions. They have been close by his side as he navigated crowds and have received mentorship to strengthen their faith.

And so I can only imagine the imposter syndrome they must have felt – of processing that moment when you know you will go from training with Jesus to being a trainer. And then, when they likely haven't even processed that, he says the game changing caveat: *take nothing for your journey except a staff and sandals; no bread, no bag, no money.*

Mark is the only gospel to include the staff and sandals on the packing list – two details that show care and provision. Whether it was for walking or protection from an animal, the disciples surely would have recalled the meaning of a staff on a journey, of stories of how God gave Moses and Aaron authority to lead Israel's liberation from Egypt – of God going with them. And, the sandals, the sandals - although a mere piece of leather strap and board – not exactly Birkenstocks, they would have given protection to their feet on those hot, dusty and rocky miles ahead.

In this passage Jesus is again summoning the disciples to go deeper in their faith by taking only the basics of what they need to freely

move and adapt for their mission. It requires a kind of trust that will rely on the hospitality of strangers and one another as traveling companions. The model is one we have come to hear and know frequently – two by two, together not alone – it is a gift of fellowship, and it is also practical – a measure of safety and shared witness affirms the message they seek to proclaim so boldly.

Their sending though does not come without the weight of their call. They have gathered after the crowds of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth have taken offense, unable to see Jesus in an identity beyond a carpenter.

I hear Jesus' words this way when rejection comes.

“Shake it off and keep going. In the calling there will be blessing, and there will be challenge. It's all part of the story, too – let it be a teaching moment on the journey ahead, go, go in the authority of my name and the companionship of one another - go.”

As many of you know, I will soon attend Virginia Theological Seminary just outside of Washington D.C. It has been out of this community that I am discerning a call to the priesthood.

In saying “yes” to this calling, it means moving back across the country, away from the Pacific Northwest and a faith community that has deeply formed me and been a spiritual home. Saltwater, mountains and evergreen have been wisdom teachers just as

the expanse of a Cathedral nave and faithfulness of this community.

Discernment is a process of trusting and letting go in seeking to see God more clearly. And sometimes the lived tension in letting go can be skipped over in linear A to B thinking.

In the context of the passage, it is the details we don't read about in between verses 11 and 12 – it's the space in between when the disciples receive Jesus' instructions and when we learn they went out and preached, healed and anointed.

For me, this space, this in between moment, the moment of "getting real" about the reality of letting go to more closely follow a calling happened earlier this year in the most unexpected way.

It started with a yellow kayak.

You see we went to renew our storage permits, permits that kept our kayaks shoreside at Fort Ward Park on the southern tip of Bainbridge Island. It was then that we learned that the spots were full – much earlier than usual. This created a dilemma in trying to figure out how to keep and access the kayaks without a place close to the water or a car that could transport them easily.

I knew that I wouldn't be able to take the kayak to seminary, but I wasn't prepared to let go beforehand.

After some time, deliberation and many tears later, the words from *this* passage began surfacing in my prayers and conversations:

Take nothing with you. Emily, what if this is your opportunity to start practicing letting go, to trust what is unfolding?

This may sound silly or dramatic to some – a kayak is just an object that can be replaced or rented or not even needed. But I wonder if you have had a moment where something you have held close links to a bigger reality, a bigger perception of loss.

During COVID, we were able to buy our own kayaks – something that we could never have imagined in those first years of living in Seattle when money was always paycheck to paycheck. The experience of paddling on open water during the pandemic opened what felt like a very constricted world and continued even as we have shifted out of those isolated days. And whenever I doubted my call to the priesthood, I would make the pilgrimage to Bainbridge Island, get in my kayak and feel the tandem of prayers and paddles to navigate the way through shifting waters.

One of the most challenging lessons in these past months has been trusting God even when it can feel like everything around me is changing and fading away as I know it – whether it is giving up a kayak or stepping back from work that I enjoy so much.

Sometimes I have been frustrated with God because in the desire to say yes, I have to feel the pain of leaving what I love without tangible reminders of what is coming.

When I get stuck there, when I get stuck in a place questioning God's presence or care, when I think God has withdrawn, I am most likely to cling to certainty instead of choosing the open waters. I wonder if it may be like that for you, too.

Thankfully God speaks through a constellation of prayer forms and for me that comes through movement, dreams, relationships and the land – all forming a pattern to orient in more courageous ways even when I want to stay close to the shore.

At Saint Mark's we are connected to a community of faithful companions who can help discern what it means to remember to trust, let go, and follow in small and big ways.

The word companion literally means to share bread together. We, like the apostles, are traveling companions as we come each week, and our journeys converge in this sacred space to share bread and story. We experience this on Wednesday evenings when we share a meal before a forum and reflect on the day together. And this fall, "A Movable Feast," will create new opportunities for building friendships around the table with neighborhood-based meals.

Together we can notice where something is letting go, where something is making way.¹

These were his instructions: take nothing for your journey except a staff and sandals; no bread, no bag, no money.

You need not travel across the country to consider the invitation of Jesus' words to you this day.

Where are you being asked to trust, to let go, and to go? Perhaps it is a job, a relationship, a thought pattern, a hobby, a ministry, a role.

Who and what may remind you of God's presence and help you hear and trust the promptings of the Holy Spirit to act - to go, to be sent?

These questions are not about forgetting and moving onto a new thing but rather shifting what has been the foreground to the background. It is not about traveling lighter to go aimlessly without purpose but rather to be more freely adaptive to the liberating call of the Beloved One who asks us to follow.

This is our continual and collective work of discernment.

As you reflect this week on what this may be for you, hear these words from Lucille Clifton's "the lesson of the falling leaves" and trust that God is with you in the letting go and in the going forth.

the leaves believe

such letting go is love

such love is faith

such faith is grace

such grace is god

i agree with the leaves

Amen.

¹ Jan Richardson, "Blessing that Becomes Empty"