

Travel Light

St. Ben's 7/7/2024

By The Rev Jen Crompton

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy One. Amen.

When I was in college I spent my spring break time volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. Our Baptist Campus ministry would organize the trips, and as an interesting side note, we were always hosted by Episcopal Churches for our meals and sleeping quarters.

The trips included bible study in the evening and days filled with hard work and a mix of tasks depending on the needs of the work sites. One year, we dug house footings for a project that would be built after we left,

I learned a lot about diversity and communities I'd never interacted with before and met Christ every day in the soon-to-be owners of those homes.

My first year, we were in Oklahoma, and it was surprisingly cold, so we ended up having to wear most of the

clothes we brought as layers as we worked. No one was prepared.

Luckily, we had work gloves to keep our hands warm but none of us had been prepared for the frost and chill of our work days. On our second day, the families came to join us for our workday and brought us hats from their homes to share with us, along with hot chocolate and apple cider. It was so generous.

They gave so freely from their limited resources, and it was very touching for all of us.

Before we left, we pooled all the money we had and went to the local gas station, which was the only store in walking distance to buy all the hats they had left to give to our family hosts as a way to return their gift and pay it forward to others.

Their generosity was something I had yet to experience in my young life. They were very excited as they already knew a few families in need.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus has returned home not to welcome and excitement but to skepticism and, ultimately, rejection by those who have known him the longest. As he begins to teach in the Synagogue, those who hear him respond

with disbelief and questions. As they ask, “What deeds of power are being done by his hands?”

Jesus responds by saying, “Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown, among their own kin, and in their own house.” It’s at this point we witness the full humanity of Jesus in this pithy remark. As the text continues, we see Jesus unable to do any additional works outside of a few healings.

At this point in Mark, we get a more pointed reminder that Jesus’ healings are more about the faith of the one being healed than a show of God’s might or an example of Jesus’ power. So as the text continues, we hear of Jesus being amazed by the disbelief of his hometown.

This experience then informs the way he will send the disciples. As Jesus moves on to teach among the villages he calls the disciples. He then gives them the authority to cast out demons and heal, sending them out in pairs.

In Mark’s version of this text, the disciples are sent out with only the bare minimum. They are to depend on the hospitality of the strangers they meet, and should they encounter rejection or refusal, they are to move on and, as Jesus instructs, “shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against

them.” This could be taken in many ways, one of which might be as a hopeful sign that once you have left a place, you leave all of it there, including the dust from your feet.

The ability to not carry a rejection or refusal forward with you and not let it shake one’s faith while doing this type of work would have been very important. As the text concludes, we see that the disciples go on to cast out demons and heal people by anointing them with oils successfully.

The practice of anointing people with healing oils remains an important practice in our communal lives together.

This text is not only about the authority, call, or authorization that Jesus passed on to his disciples to continue the work of ministering to the sick and those in need of care but also the responsibility that came along with that authority.

Sometimes we shy away from talking about the idea of authority in the text. Maybe because it has been used in destructive ways and we want to ensure we are being responsible with our use of the text. I hope that as we engage with this text, we understand this authority as a call that then demands action and carries a responsibility as disciples of Jesus.

In this text, we are not only reminded of Jesus' humanity but also reminded that we are called to travel light. Taking only the bare minimum of what we might need for our journey. When we are not welcome in a place, we can simply shake the dust off our sandals and move on, yet it remains important that we stop by.

This text remains an important model for our own experience of evangelism, or the telling our own faith stories. What experiences have we each had that might be a witness of God's unconditional love? How are we making examples of Jesus' teachings in our lives?

The goal here is to live the gospel message. To let our inner light shine.

This text wasn't about how many people heard the message or whether new believers joined; it was about the faith of those who were sent.

This is about us. It's about digging deeper into our understanding of God's love for us, where we see God in the world and Christ in each other.

What story of faith are we sharing with the world and our neighbor? This text challenges us to ask a different set of

questions. To worry less about how we are being perceived and think more about just getting out there to begin with.

This text wasn't about Jesus giving the disciples the right words to say as he sent them out to do their work. It shows us that Jesus authorized them to do the work they needed to do and the work he wouldn't have been able to do on his own.

His decision to empower his disciples expanded the ministry, enabling the message of God's love to extend beyond him in that moment.

As we live our lives as disciples of Jesus, we make decisions every day that reflect on lessons learned within this community over time. How do our actions show people outside these walls that we are followers of Jesus? We travel light, and when we find an inhospitable place, we walk away and shake off the dust on our feet, continuing our journey to cast off the demons of our society and anointing all we can with the healing balm of the message of God's unconditional love.

The actions of the families who shared their resources with us during that Habitat for Humanity trip showed us Christ in the stranger. Inspiring us to do what we could to return the favor.

As we processed the days during our bible study time, we would all find ways to connect to the divine within us. Learning how to bear witness to God's love in community.

I believe we can all find ways to express our love for Christ in words or actions to those outside these walls. There are no right words. Your story, our story, is worth sharing. Start in your cloister group if you are a part of one, then share with a close friend outside of church. The more you talk about how much you love being a part of this community, the easier it becomes.

If you want some practice, get involved with the Discovery team or maybe one of the outreach ministries to take your love of God into the community.

This is important work and an important part of our call as disciples.

We are called to share the good news with the world.

And so my prayer for us all this week is that as we take the time to reflect on our journeys, we find the courage to share boldly our love of Christ and this community as it wraps us in God's unending love for us all. **Amen**