

CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, VALDOSTA GEORGIA JULY 8, 2018

Ezekiel 2:1-5

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

Psalms 123

Mark 6:1-13

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. +

Once upon a time, in a distant kingdom . . . I was born. Born into a city where the sun never goes down. Born into a city where people of all ages, colors, nationalities sit side by side on subways that racket from one end of town to the other. That's New York, of course, a place where although you may not know your neighbor, everyone is your neighbor.

When I think of going back home to visit, I picture both the crowded avenues and the streets that grow silent when the snow falls, trees glittering and sparkling in the light of the streetlamps. I remember, as a child, sitting on a park bench on Riverside Drive, delighting in the snow drift that covered my knees. At night, I would dream about being locked in and forgotten in the Museum of Natural History, so that I could pat the Tyrannosaurus Rex on the nose and walk up close, really close, to all those marvelous African masks.

Things have changed, of course, and so have I. If you've been away from home for a lengthy time, you know exactly what I mean. Nothing looks quite the same when you go back; and even if it did, you'd react differently.

So I both rejoice and sympathize with anyone who, after a long time, returns home. Like Jesus. And he has changed—oh how he has changed. He waded into the Jordan River; met up with John the Baptist; and walked through Galilee. He gathered his disciples; healed Peter's mother-in-law; raised up a paralyzed man and brought back to life the daughter of a synagogue leader. There isn't time to go through the complete list!

And yet, when the Lord of the Sabbath returns to his hometown, he's scorned. It would be as if you looked sideways at your neighbors right this minute and said, who do these people think they are, anyway, coming to Christ Church? For Jesus, it's worse. As the leaders of the congregation point out, he's only a carpenter, a poor man; and he's the son of Mary—no mention of his father. And wisdom? What on earth can he teach us?

The result, as Mark says, is that “he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.” What irony. Isn't healing the sick a deed of power? And there's more. Jesus “was amazed at their unbelief.” What a warning--perhaps, if they had believed, he might have done more.

Then he calls his disciples, his “followers,” “and began to send them out two by two.”

I find that scary. Because if we are believers, if we are followers, we too are being sent out to explore unknown territories.

Now, as many of you know, I love to travel. My bright red parka and knee-high boots have trekked through Alaska, and Antarctica and Greenland! What a trip *that* was-- we went from the thermal fields of Iceland across the strait of Denmark, onto the Greenland Viking settlement. It's a wondrous place—it's where the first Christian church in the New World was settled a thousand years ago by Tjordhilde, wife of Eric the Red. You need to go, lace up your shoes and go, stand on that tiny foundation on the edge of a cliff. The waterfall behind you dances and sings its way down the mountain, and you can almost hear the shouts of praise outside the church, where I am sure the converts were baptized. It is magical.

But the disciples didn't wear parkas and boots; they were sent out with "nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money," wearing only sandals and a tunic. I wish, when I travel, I could do that.

I can only guess as to why they were sent out that way. Perhaps to make **us** think. If two people appeared in our doorway dressed like beggars, would we invite them in and offer them dinner? Even more, offer them a listening ear? Would we have the courage to pray, as our own mission team did daily, "Give bread to those who are hungry, and give a hunger for justice to those of us who have bread"?

I think there's a double lesson here. On one hand, like the folks in Jesus's home town, we are asked to believe. Believe in the teachings of God's own son who is present in spirit in the littlest and the least. We are asked to put our faith into action, to welcome the stranger who may, in fact, be right next to us.

On the other hand, we are also commissioned to be sent out, wearing whatever we have on, to become disciples. So what does that mean?

We all know about the famous disciples, like Oscar Romero, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or the Civil Rights leaders Fannie Lou Hamer and Rosa Parks.

But how about disciples closer to home? Well, take a look around at the Lunch Bunch, altar guild, teachers, choir members—I can't name them all. Look at those who quietly go out to help the Soup Kitchen, Second Harvest, the school systems. Look at those who went on the Youth Mission or to the Dominican—they were sent, sent by the Holy Spirit to share their talents. To share their faith, to put their faith into action. And talk about being welcomed! Children and adults hugged them; people fed them and worked side-by-side with them.

Jesus called them. He calls us. We are his disciples. Well.

I am afraid of many things: fire ants, for instance; being tossed in water—I can't swim; even sometimes being asked to preach!—but my fears are nothing like the fear of following in His footsteps. Think of where they led! The crucifixion.

But they also led somewhere else. Life itself. Talk about grace! Jesus too was sent—sent to point us to the way, the truth, the life.

None of the disciples—from the ones in Mark to the ones in Mississippi to the ones right here in Valdosta—none of them were silent. They had the great assurance from Jesus, who said, “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

And so I read again and again what we are commissioned to do:

. . . have no fear . . . What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.

We are disciples. We need pull on our boots and go. We are being sent to proclaim from the housetops in action and in spirit the sheer grace of God's universal love.

As we go out into the world, let us remember the words of an old Celtic prayer, used by both the Northumbria Community and by our own Dominican Mission team for evening prayer:

May the peace of the Lord go with you
Wherever he may send you;
May he guide you through the
wilderness,
Protect you through the storm.

May he bring you home rejoicing
At the wonders He has shown you.
May he bring you home rejoicing,
Once again into our doors.

In His Holy Name. +