

July 4, 2021

“Traveling Light”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Mark 6:1-12

He left that place and 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.

Sermon “Traveling Light”

I remember when the UCC had just come out with the saying “We don’t take the bible literally but we take it seriously” and it was being presented at my annual conference. There was this man in the crowd who I happened to know was very dissatisfied with the direction the UCC had taken when it voted for marriage equality at General Synod and I could tell he was very agitated. Well he yelled out to the conference minister, interrupting him, “what do you mean you either believe all of it or none of it!

I remember feeling sorry for him and having compassion for him, because he was having a difficult time changing a belief system that the very church we were standing in had instilled in him. He was a good man but couldn’t keep up with the pace of the church and now he was feeling rejected by it. Even though we were in strong disagreement, I would never wish that feeling on anyone.

But the other reason I felt sorry for him was because that kind of black and white thinking would rob him of one of the greatest gifts in my life, to be able to open the bible and to let the Holy spirit give me comfort and direction and speak to my heart in ways that no other book ever has.

You see, when I can look past the contradictions, when I can see past the sexism, racism, and violence inherent to it and if I don't see it in a history book or rule book then I am constantly moved by it. What amazes me is that even though I know this book, and I have studied these scriptures and have preached and taught them over and over again, they constantly still surprise me, amaze me, comfort, encourage and inspire me. I have preached on this morning's passage several times in my ministry but for the first time, for the first time when I read it this week a question came to me like a prayer.

How did that make Jesus feel? To be rejected by his own people, his family, his temple, his childhood friends. Now Jesus is very popular by this time, remember he is being followed around by hoards of people but not in this place, not in his hometown. He is not Jesus the miracle worker, he's just Jesus, the son of a carpenter, and he hears "what does he think he's doing coming home and doing all that stuff?" Or "that's not how we do it around here, that's not the way he was brought up!"

And you will remember a few weeks back when we read the third chapter of Mark, when Jesus' family showed up uninvited because they were worried he'd gone out of his mind. Well this is just a continuation of that theme of rejection by those closest to him and now his whole hometown is in on it.

What did that do to him? What was he feeling? It does seem to diminish his gift. At first the text says "He could do no great deed of power there except heal a couple of people" It's like that hurt took the wind out of his sails for a bit, sank his confidence and energy for his ministry. The scripture doesn't really tell us a lot but I can imagine him feeling the pain of it all, I can imagine it making him very hurt and angry and we all know what rejection feels like, you don't get through life without it.

The memory that came up for me when I first read through this was once a very painful one. It was about my church and family and friends rejecting me when I first came out in the eighties. That was probably the greatest wound of my life. And I didn't just shake off my sandals and move on, though I acted like I did. It took a whole lot of healing for me to get to a place that I could forgive and move on.

But a friend pointed out to me once that those events that wounded me might have been the very thing that God used to pull and call me into ministry. See, I wanted to be a part of telling the world the good news, once I finally heard it, that every single one of us is loved by God, even that man who yelled at my conference who was now feeling like an outcast because his beloved church had changed and moved on without him. I didn't want anyone to feel rejected by their church like I did.

To spread that love of God is my passion and it may not have been if I hadn't gone through what I went through. So back to Jesus, I wonder if God used his wounds to bend his heart even more toward the rejected ones, the outcasts, did he feel more passion for these people because he was now one of them?

As you know I don't believe God ever causes bad things to happen to us in life to test us or mold our character but I know beyond a doubt that God can heal us of the hurt and use those very things to bring us closer to being the people God wants us to be, living in a world that God still only dreams of.

What was that song by Rascal Flatts a few years ago. "God Bless the Broken Road." We never know when our struggles today are going to be stepping stones onto an even better path.

Jesus though, he doesn't waste a decade to get over his rejection like I did. He gets to work. He organizes his disciples and gives them their marching orders. They are just to take a staff and the clothes on their back. They are to rely on God and the kindness and faith of strangers. They are to travel lightly. I'm so glad that Jesus never asked me to do this. I do not travel lightly. I have a basement full of 50 plus years of junk that proves that I don't and I could probably survive a week just on the contents of my backpack alone.

But what if we think of traveling lightly in a different way-- to travel lightly in our spirit. Jesus shows us how to unload that hurt he felt, that pain because ultimately, his self worth doesn't come from his family, or hometown. It comes from God. From that sure knowledge in himself that he is being loved and guided by God.

Knowing this, he is able to let go of that hurt and go about doing God's business. He is able to practice what he preaches about forgiveness. He is able to shake the dust from his sandals and move on when he is ready to move on.

When I think about that heartbreak I had all those years ago and recognize that it is being used by God for me to see the heartbreak of others more clearly, I can't hold onto any of that hurt any more, because my hurt has been made holy by our God that can do that, that can heal those hurts, and use those hurts.

A God that helps us to forgive and thrive no matter what. A God that can bless our broken road and help us to move on and get busy doing the work of love in this world. And there's a whole lot of that that needs doing.

Whatever heartaches you've had, whatever rejection you've had, I want you to take a look at them and recognize those places where God has made your wounds holy. Where God has used those wounds to help someone else who needs to know someone else survived their sorrow or where has God used your wounds to deepen your spirituality and closeness to God. I want you to look back at your own broken and stony roads and see where God has blessed them and seek to travel as lightly on them as you can. AMEN

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