

2 Easter, Year C, RCL

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

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How wonderful it is to be sharing this time with you this morning. It was 12 years ago that this parish sent me off to General Seminary. The journey since we left here has been pretty interesting, going from New York, to Michigan, to Oklahoma and now to North Carolina. Not quite home to Virginia Beach, but close enough so that we can be here today with you.

Scripture teaches us that we are called by God to something. In my case, it was to ordained ministry, however, most are called to something other than ordained ministry. Bobby, for example, has been called to a ministry of music. Others are called to a less public form of ministry, but regardless of how visible it is, it is valid and important.

Biblical stories speak a lot about God calling people. Moses was called to bring the people out of Egypt. Abraham was called to become the father of the Hebrew people and that eventually leads to Jesus and the disciples - and ultimately to you and me. Mary was called to become the mother of our lord. I am sure you can think of other examples.

Knowing this, we should take note of a couple of things. First, God uses everyday people. He does not call the wealthy, the influential, the powerful. Secondly, that call was not always met with ready acceptance. Think of Jonah running away from God. The stories that we have show normal people being asked to do, as they thought, what seemed to be unusual and often impossible.

I have often wondered about the stories of Jesus calling the disciples. We are told that he called twelve and all twelve accepted. Still I have to wonder how of there were others who were called and declined. We will never know, for if there were, they were left out of the story.

As we enter the Easter season, the Gospel story, as we heard this morning, continues with the theme of calling but with a new twist - they are told to get going. As the story goes, Jesus died on the cross and everyone became despondent and thought all their hopes and dreams were over. Then Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection. Hope springs anew from the disciples. The disciples were reinvigorated and energized. In spite of Thomas showing a little petulance and demanding that he had to see Jesus in order to believe, we can easily see the light, excitement and hope in the stories after the darkness of the crucifixion. It is obvious that the disciples had entered into a new time. Not only were they called, but now empowered and sent forth.

The disciples' story is a lot like our own story. We can see ourselves there. Three

years before the crucifixion Jesus called each of them out of their routine daily lives. He called them into the unknown for he did not tell them anything about what they were going to do. He just said, "Follow me." And they had a decision to make, as each of us does - to follow or to decline. Declining means maintaining the status quo. Accepting leads down a path of unknown adventure.

And what an adventure the disciples entered into. They had the opportunity to meet lots of interesting people from all walks of life and social status, travel all over the region, learn from a master rabbi and dream of a time when they would receive reward and honor - or so some of them thought. Then they came face to face with the reality of working in the vineyard. It is hard work. Things don't always go as expected. There can be danger and disappointment. As many of us know, mountain top experiences are often followed by dark valley times.

That is where we meet the disciples today - in a dark, lonely, fearful place. And then, Jesus comes among them like a cheerleader to remind them of what they are about. This isn't the end. It is just the beginning of their long journey.

The first thing he does is reassure them that all will be well. They may have been scared and hiding on that night, but Jesus came among them, immediately assuring them that they are safe and secure in his presence and that their world is no longer in danger of falling apart. "Put aside your fear for I am here. Peace be with you." The peace of Jesus is the firm foundation we have been given to stand upon. The presence of Christ in our lives is the bedrock that supports us as we make our faith journey responding to our call.

But Jesus doesn't want them to just sit around feeling safe. Over the three years with him they received the gifts and tools needed for their journey. He says to them, "As the father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus pushes them out of the nest to carry out their mission - to spread the good news. We are not meant to sit still. We are not meant to hold on to the status quo. We are meant to go forth, often into the unknown, the uncomfortable, into the midst of those who are different from us. We have the foundation and training and the tools, now we have been given the mission.

Jesus recognizes that mission will be hard work. So the disciples got some help. Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He literally "inspired" them when he put the Spirit into them. They became filled with divine energy and insight so they could move forward with God's own power and guidance within them. We too receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism. We too have received the divine energy and insight needed to respond to our calling, our mission, our journey.

Then, knowing there will be times when the journey will be challenged by twist and turns and obstructions, Jesus assured them that mistakes would be forgiven. "If you forgive

the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” We are challenged by many things on our journey. Others will make mistakes. We will make mistakes. If we do not forgive others, then God will not forgive us. That is Jesus’ challenge to us: to journey toward forgiveness, toward reconciliation, toward embracing our enemies as God has embraced us in Christ. Our journey through life as we follow Jesus can be very rocky at times. We don’t always go where we want to go or have things turn out the way we want. Following means taking the course laid out before us.

These are the things Jesus gave to the disciples - and that he gives to us. Called from an everyday life, we receive a firm foundation, a mission, the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit and assurance that regardless of how often we stumble, all will be well. Then we were told to get up and get going. That is the lesson we take away from this scripture. We have or will receive a call to work in the vineyard. We have the choice to accept or reject. When we accept we will find that we have just the right gifts for the mission.

Sometimes, we have to be reminded that today is not the end of the story. It is just the beginning. And there is work to be done. What your calling will be only you and Jesus know. So respond and go forth, crying out at the top of your voice: Alleluia! Christ is risen. - The Lord has risen indeed. Alleluia!