

Sermon preached on Sunday, July 8, 2018
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost | [Proper 9, Year B](#)
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It must have been terrifying to be one of Jesus' original disciples. They've only been with him a little while, during which time he has been, at a dizzying pace, healing the sick and performing miracles and even raising the dead, all while zigzagging back and forth across the borders of Jewish and Gentile territories on both sides of the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples have not been able to understand much about Jesus - they often show a serious lack of comprehension of his words and his actions - but what has been becoming clear is that Jesus often faces rejection, first by his family and then by the religious community, and today, by the people of his hometown. He had been all powerful, stilling storms and bringing new life to the desperate, and yet today in the face of rejection he is inexplicably unable to bring forth much of that power.

And what does Jesus do? He calls his disciples together and sends them out into the world to be his witnesses, to do his work, to heal and forgive and bring wholeness to all who want it wherever they are. And they are to go out without provisions, trusting that they will be cared for along the way - except for when they are rejected like Jesus is today. They have been rather thick headed and inept so far. How can this be a good idea?

So I am terrified for them. How would I feel if I were one of them? My stomach flips over with anxiety at the thought of being sent out to do such important work with so little preparation, at the thought of being rejected by those I hope to serve, at the thought of relying on others for food and shelter, for my very well-being.

Well, you might say, look, he sends them out two by two. They aren't to do this work alone. They aren't to live this life alone. They are to have companions on their way. That part is baked into the plan Jesus has for them. They are not alone. Doesn't that make me feel better?

Truthfully, that's where my struggle often lies. I need to be reminded constantly that I am not in this life alone. Our culture prizes the solitary hero, the self-sufficient pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps type. I don't like asking for directions. I gloried in the old Saab advertising slogan from the mid-1990's "Find your own road" and have a special fondness for Frank Sinatra's rebellious song "I Did It My Way." In school I dreaded working on group projects.

And at the same time, my heart sometimes sinks when I imagine that it's all up to me to accomplish something big. Like doing God's work in the world. I feel inadequate and untrained and maybe even unworthy. And so, I struggle.

Of course, it isn't just Jesus's original disciples who are called to go out into the world as channels of God's grace and mercy, to offer healing and hope to a broken world. As Christians, as followers of Jesus, this is our calling, too. Jesus sends us out, too, as thick headed and inept and untrained as we might feel. We say this every week after communion: Send us out into the world. And again at the end of the service: Go out into the world to love and serve. And this sometimes terrifies me and

makes my stomach flip over with anxiety. Even though Jesus sends us out together, not alone. Even though I can tell myself over and over it's not all up to me.

Because living this life Jesus calls us to requires us to trust. Seriously and radically. To trust God, to trust that God will give us what we need, and to trust each other, that we will be safe together.

That's the core of this whole thing. To trust that God goes with us where we go and to trust that despite our human limitations we will honor one another, that we will work for one another's well-being, that we will remember that our common life depends upon each other's toil, that we will be there for one another through good times and bad.

Frankly, it seems that trust is in short supply these days. We are polarized as a people and even our "tribes" disintegrate further into factions at the drop of a hat. Conspiracy theories run rampant and cries of "fake news" serve to confuse us. We are tempted to run to our silos, to our echo-chambers, to escape from it all or maybe even to get the adrenaline flowing so we can gear up for the fight because maybe fighting helps us feel as if we are at least Doing Something and not just sitting by watching the world go to hell as people on the "other side" champion causes we believe to be wrong.

And being trusting feels naive. You know what people say: Don't be a sucker, don't fall for a scam, people are just out for what they can get, never let them see you sweat, never let them see you cry, keep your guard up, don't let your guard down. Etc etc etc. Trusting feels naive and possibly even dangerous.

But there it is. In all our relationships, without trust, we do not truly connect. Everything is superficial and provisional. Without trust, I have one foot out the door. Without trust, I get stuck and stay stuck, unable to participate fully in the abundant life that God wants for me.

We often hear Jesus say that he and the father are one and he abides in us and we in him, but that abiding oneness requires trust, and many of us are not able to completely go there with God or with each other, perhaps because of our own histories or because we have internalized societal messages that it is naive and dangerous to be too trusting.

Ernest Hemingway, a guy to whom I don't usually look for advice, said that the best way to find out if you can trust anybody is to trust them. Just jump in. And I think he was right. Trust starts with understanding and believing in goodness but then we just have to do it.

Our Bible stories are all about God being good, being trustworthy, loving us no matter what, unconditionally, and saving us no matter how badly we mess up. Such a God is trustworthy, all of our stories say, although you and I know that there are times when God seems far away and baffling. But still. God is good and God is love.

And with people, well, that's even harder. It is hard to believe that those with whom I disagree so completely are also made in God's image and therefore might be intrinsically good. It's hard to believe that those so different from me might be safe. It's hard to believe that basically people are trying the best they can and so deserve my empathy rather than my scorn or disapproval when I

think they are making the wrong choices. It is hard to be trusting in our world that warns us at every turn not only not to trust but to be positively afraid of each other.

And we see every day the fruit of that fear.

We are called to something else. Jesus is countercultural, his voice stands over against the sound and fury of the wind and the waves and the world that calls us to fear. Jesus calls us to love God and love one another, to build up the community and not to tear it down, to repair the breaches between us and not to widen them.

And so I guess it is still terrifying to be a disciple of Jesus, because this is hard, hard work, this loving and trusting and building up and repairing and bringing new life to the desperate. We are meant to honor the divine in one another and there are days my heart sinks and I just don't think I can do it.

But Jesus sent out his followers two by two. We are meant to be companions to one another in this work. It's not up to me alone or you alone but you and me together to build a community of trust, right here, to build many communities of trust in this beautiful and broken world.

And, Lord help us, I cannot imagine a better time to begin that holy work than right now.