

I Walk In Faith and Hope

a sermon delivered by the Rev. Scott Dalgarno for July 3, 2022

based on Luke 10:1-11

I will begin with a reminiscence by Joann Rowley of Englewood, Colorado.

AS A GIRL, thirty-five years ago, I was idealistic, energetic, imaginative, and uncompromising in my convictions. My heart went out to the poor, the oppressed, the suffering in body or spirit. I fought for civil rights, prayed for world peace, and donated my lunch money to help stop the clubbing of baby seals.

Now, after two divorces, raising a daughter, and years of trying to balance work and home life, I am too tired to notice what needs fixing in the world, and too disillusioned to believe it can be fixed, anyway. I rarely read the papers. "Ignorance is bliss" has become my motto.

Where is that young girl with her lofty ideals? Where did she lose her way?

I am sad to say, Joann's story is not a rare one. A lot of people have their youthful idealism bled out of them. They, or maybe I should say, we, – we become so tired This is known today as, "compassion fatigue." I bet you know what I mean. Millions are feeling it now.

In this morning's text, the young disciples of Jesus are about to go out two-by-two to announce that God's kingdom has arrived; is fully present in the world. No one needs to stand waiting for a chariot to come from the clouds. No, Jesus is present and he's the real deal.

No one needs to wait to hear a thunder-clap that will announce that Roman rule in Palestine is over. Rome is strong but its power will eventually collapse under its own imperial weight. It is clear to these followers that God's power is present and abundant in the message, in the healing power, in the love of Jesus.

This Palestinian peasant, Jesus, may seem a puny man to the naked eye, but the power of God's message through him looks to his idealistic friends like it will last forever.

But Jesus knows that his is not going to be a message many people are going to be prepared to understand. Jesus is worried that his young cohort will lose their enthusiasm pretty quickly under the sarcasm and disdain of those they will preach to.

He seems worried they might want to oversell him. I mean, his message is so simple, so unadorned, and it calls for a simple, unadorned delivery.

It calls for maximum integrity from the message givers. So, Jesus has the following advice for these seventy young people who will carry it.

He says, “When you go out now to tell people about the kingdom of God, for heaven’s sake, **don’t** take a lot of baggage. Just go with carry-on. Depend on the hospitality of those who welcome you. And when you go, don’t move from house to house looking for the best place in town, saying things like, “Boy the Muggilicuddy’s beds are hard. We’re going to spend tomorrow morning looking for a better place.”

No, stay where you are with whoever takes you in because I don’t want anybody to get the impression that you’re comparing members of that community favorably or unfavorably with one another according to their means. Don’t leave a small town in disarray when you leave it.

Whether they offer you a straw mattress or something that enables you to float in mid-air, just accept it. And whatever they set before you, eat it. Don’t look down at the table and say, “What? Chicken again?”

Jesus is inferring that what is set before these fellows to eat will sometimes be Kosher food, and sometimes Gentile food. He’s saying, “Don’t reject anything, because I do not want anyone to think we make any ethnic distinctions before God.

I want you to make clear that everybody, whether they feed you out of their food stamp allowance, or whether they entertain 30 guests every night with take-away from *McCormick and Schmick’s*, before God, it’s all the same. Is that’s clear?”

“And then I want you to announce to them the following: ‘The kingdom of God is here.’” That’s the good news, and it is simple -- God’s love and grace is present in the person of Jesus himself.

It’s not on its way. No, it’s right here. There’s been no mistake. This is the world God wanted everyone to be born into no matter what the world’s dire circumstances. God is busy, patiently working God’s will out in their lives through those very events.

Jesus knows this is the hardest lesson for so many people to get. Most think there has been a mistake and that they need to be tons richer, healthier, more beautiful, more talented before anything good and worthwhile can actually happen through them.

Some take almost a lifetime to learn this lesson. Some, sadly, never learn it at all. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t true.

And Jesus levels with them: “You will go into some places where they will reject you. You won’t be welcome. Some days you will receive no hospitality, no food. Nothing.”

“Well,” they ask, “What are we to do then?”

Jesus says: “Follow the ancient pattern – shake the dust off your sandals – not in anger – just perfunctorily. Just like you do when you’re putting your sandals on every morning, sitting on your doorstep.

By doing this, you will be saying without words, ‘I leave you to God. I’ll let you figure it out on your own.’ But listen, whatever you do, don’t fuss at the people.” Don’t be condescending.”

Then someone asks him, “But what if they say ‘No,’ to the message?”

Now, this is the important part. This is where the broken, worn-down spirit of Joann I told you about in the beginning of this sermon comes in.

Jesus says, “It’s not up to you to get anybody to say, ‘Yes.’ . . . or ‘No,’ for that matter.” How they respond is not your business and not your fault. Leave that to God.

Just give them the Good News that God's kingdom is present and alive, just as things are. And whether they accept what you say or call you an idiot, let your demeanor be the same.

Either way, you need not worry about the outcome. It has nothing to do with you, and everything to do with God.

Mother Theresa once said, "We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful." God oversees the rest.

There is a Jewish tradition that shines a steady light on this truth. It goes this way: There are 36 righteous people in every generation on whom the salvation of the world rests. Just 36. Yes, and everything depends on them.

They are quiet, unassuming and don't even know they are of the 36. If someone says they are I the 36 then they are assuredly not. At some point in their lives the genuine ones are called upon to do their good work. They do it quietly without attention to themselves and then just as quietly, they disappear. They are not the Mother Theresa's of the world because we know who she is. These are nameless. They live to do their one needful thing at their one pregnant moment. Then they disappear. They don't even have to be especially gifted. They just need to witness to the truth as they understand it.

If you were watching the surprise January 6th hearing on Thursday, Cassidy Hutchison may be such a person; one of the 36. Who knows?

So, here is what Jesus wants those who follow him to say to folks wondering about God's workings: just say, "The reign of God is here, on earth, working quietly, mysteriously. You will never understand it's ways and you don't have to understand those ways to be a tiny part of it.

And this is good news for two reasons – because you never have to worry whether you've done a good enough job, and secondly, you don't have to explain how it all works to anyone.

Jesus says, "I'm telling you this because I want you to understand that your message, your life, your behavior, your relationships, don't need to be determined by other people.

So, don't react to them. Don't react in anger, or disgust, or resentment. No, just deliver the message. Be yourself. Whether they say 'yes' or 'no' is not the point. You are to be children of God."

"Remember my teaching," he says – "If you only speak nicely to those who speak nicely to you, what is that? If you only offer hospitality to those who offer it to you, what's that?"

If you are only generous to those who are generous to you, what is that? It's not the economy of God. No, that's the economy of humans.

"You are to act as God would act. And yes that is a tall order, but it's what you are to do. And, you know. It's simpler that way. God is love and God acts out of love and so should you.

Remember, God sends the nourishing rain on the just and the unjust just the same, and so should you. Behavior from you that is any different is just not from God.

If someone won't hear you out, or spits in your face, just move on, and say, 'The kingdom of God is here in this place. I know, I know; it's hard to see.'"

Now, this is a difficult teaching, I admit that. But it is Jesus' teaching. As such it is simple and also deep. "Do not react to anybody's behavior. Instead, be yourself. As God acts out of God's character, you act out of yours."

Because, here's the deal about reacting: When you react you are letting other people dictate the situation. First, realize that. Then commit yourself to be alert to it, and stop the habitual cycle of reacting to them.

Just be yourself. Without baggage, without an agenda. You don't need to puff yourself up bigger than life, or humble yourself down so you're small and wincing.

No, stand at your true height and deliver your life's message, whatever it is, "as-is." No apologies. No hype.

And, you know, I bet that some time in your life, the best advice you ever got was this kind of advice; this same advice that Jesus gave the 70: You don't need ten sets of clothes, or an attorney, or a parachute. You don't even need to carry a flashlight.

Sometimes, to do the most important thing you've been put on this earth to do, whatever it is, all you will need is the standard issue *You*. You will just need to be you. Anything added will just take away from what you have to offer.

What I am saying is that God didn't make a mistake when you were made. To fulfill your mission in this life you have just what you need.

You know, nine times out of ten people mess up because they are too busy looking around at other people, comparing themselves unfavorably to someone else.

Imagine yourself as a runner in a race. If you are constantly thinking about your opponents and how you stack up against them you will be defeated before you begin. But if you run because running is what you love to do you will do your best.

Look at the birds of the air -- they fly with such precision. They fly through *massive* trees dense with leaves in summer, and never run into a branch. They land on limbs with apparently no effort. They never think; "Uh oh, I'm up so high here, I'm terrified I'm going to fall."

Again, this takes waking up. Realizing where we are prone to merely react to people or situations. You have to wake up to take back your natural poise.

Here's a simple but also profound reflection on waking up. It's from a piece in the *New York Times* by Mary Laura Philpott.

I will close with it.

When we become adults, we lose the prompt to reboot our lives every fall. But we don't have to.

When I was in elementary school, a classmate of mine once returned to campus in September to announce that henceforth, she would be going by her middle name. Goodbye Megan, hello Jules. Her friends spent a week quizzing her about her choice and then moved on. It was a new school year, and everyone was starting over.

Someone had a new haircut and pierced ears; someone got glasses; someone stopped playing soccer and joined the band; someone switched lunch tables. Big deal.

I'm jealous of my childhood-self now when I remember that every fall we got to start over, as if our lives were getting a routine software upgrade.

I cleaned out my book bag, tossed old notebooks, lined up fresh pencils, got my feet measured for new shoes and showed up to school ready to learn. I bemoaned the end of summer, but I also loved the sense of possibility a new grade held. Mystery and possibility don't come calling for us so often in adulthood. When we get out of school, we lose that annual prompt for reinvention. I miss it.

Without that automatic opportunity to reintroduce ourselves to the world, we get a chance at a reboot only if we manufacture it. So I've decided I'm going to look at this fall as if I'm starting the next level in school. If I pick up where I left off, that would put me in (please hold while I count on my fingers ...) 40th grade.

I'm not the only one I know with plans to mix things up this fall. There's something about [that] time of year, even this far removed from our student days, that signals a fresh start.

One of my friends — she'd be in 42nd grade now — is taking the new-school-year-new-me concept literally, starting classes at the same time as her elementary-schoolers, step one of a plan to earn her master's degree and change careers. A friend in 39th grade is finally starting therapy, committed to figuring out whether it's time to end a relationship that doesn't seem to be working for her anymore.

I'm starting 40th grade by changing how I allocate my time. First, I'm setting my alarm 12 minutes earlier, downloading the Calm app and adding guided meditation to my mornings. Before I start responding to various stimuli, I want to begin the day on my own terms, in peace.

Second, I've cut back my hours at my day job, meaning I'll be able to sit right down to my writing most days instead of opening work email. Will meditating for a few minutes help me take a more serene approach to life? Will I get more work done on my new schedule? Or with less regular income and more solitude, will I go broke and/or insane? In 40th grade, I'll find out!

Sometimes the hardest work in life is learning to be yourself.

Amen