

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:1-13

Peace Lutheran Church, Grass Valley - 7/5/15

“ARE YOU READY?”

“Are you ready?” “Are you ready yet?” “Are you ready yet? It’s time to go!”

How often have we heard or asked that question in the years that we were growing up, the years that we were dating, the years we’ve been married, or the years when we began to slow down just a bit from the pace at which we had previously lived?

If you are like I am . . . (and I know that I am, as a friend of ours likes to say) . . . you have heard or asked that question more times than you can remember or at least more times than you would like to recall or admit.

For most of us, at least in this day and at this stage in our lives . . . (whatever that stage is) . . . are, more often than not, over-booked or overloaded or over-extended and try to cram far too much or far too many activities into our daily lives, with the result that we are often running late or nearly late and, as a result, get asked or need to ask the question, “Are you ready?”

“Are you ready?”

What that means, of course, is that, if we are ready, we have made the preparations that we need to make for wherever it is that we are going. We have bathed or showered, shaved or primped, dressed and eaten, gathered to take with us what we need to have when we arrive where we are going, and are ready to walk out the door, get in the car, and be on our way.

In short, we’re ready and we are prepared to do whatever it is we are going to do once we arrive at our destination. The question is, of course, however, what is it that we’re going to do and, therefore, what is it that we need to be prepared for doing?

In our Gospel for today, Jesus has called his disciples to him and begun to send them out into the villages surrounding Nazareth to deal with what Mark calls the “unclean spirits.”

To make sure that they were ready for this new assignment, Jesus, we read, “gave them authority over the spirits.” That’s all. They had no baccalaureate or doctoral degrees, they had no documents or letters of instruction or of introduction.

In fact, Jesus ordered them, Mark tells us, “take nothing for their journey except a good walking stick; no bread, no haversack, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on an extra or spare tunic.”

“If you enter someone’s house somewhere,” said Jesus, “then stay there until you leave the area, and do not move around from place to place to see if you can better your accommodations.”

“If you discover that you are not welcome somewhere, then that people do not pay attention to you, as you walk away from that place shake the dust off from your feet as a sign to them, and don’t worry about their ungraciousness or their inhospitality. That is their problem, and not yours.”

“So they went out,” we read, “and proclaimed that all people should repent.” They also “cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”

Were they ready? Were they ready for the task that Jesus gave them? Were they ready for the possibilities and opportunities that they discovered or encountered? Were they ready for the unexpected?

From all we can see or tell, they were. The question now, herefore, is, “are we ready?” Are we ready for the tasks that Jesus has entrusted unto us? Are we prepared to meet and deal with what we find when we go out into world? Are we prepared for what still lies ahead of us in our lives? Are we?

One of the things that continues to amuse both Gloria and me when we are traveling is how much luggage most people take with them on a journey.

Just last month, for instance, as we boarded once again a cruise ship, we saw piles and piles of huge suitcases piled up on the dock, waiting to be lifted by a huge fork lift onto the ship, then brought by the room stewards to the rooms assigned to those to whom the suitcases . . . supposedly, at least . . . belonged.

In the meantime, Gloria and I, each of us with our single carry-on that fits if need be, underneath the seat ahead of us on an airplane, plus a “personal item,” as they’re called today . . . (a euphemism for all kinds of things, we have discovered) . . . have already boarded, found our room, unpacked our stuff, checked in at the front desk to see what messages awaited us, and gone to meet the Cruise Director and the Event Manager who had, as usual, a message for me in regard to the one Bible Study, two Sunday Morning Communion Services and three Weekday Sea Day Devotional Services that I would be conducting on the ship within the following two weeks.

By that time, it was time for lunch and so we went, as we most often do, to the Lido deck to the buffet there and, of course, enjoyed our lunch. Along the way, both going up and coming down, we saw the room stewards still wrestling with the luggage that was still being brought onto the ship and which the passengers who earlier had checked their luggage were awaiting.

It was not, of course, an unexpected sight, but we still smiled at it, as we are often wont to do. Not that our not being dependent upon someone else to bring us our luggage made us any better than those who depended on the stewards, but that we continue wondering why people feel that they need so much stuff.

“Beats me,” is all that I can say, and then I thought again about our Gospel for this morning, even though I didn’t know at the time that when we got home I would be asked to preach on it today. “God does work in mysterious ways Her wonders to perform,” I always like to say.

In any case, as we reflect today on the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples, there are, I believe, three points that he is making: 1) we are not to be overly concerned about our independence; 2) it is OK to be dependent; and 3) it is vital that we trust God.

Only when we have learned and given evidence of having mastered these three lessons will we be able to live life to its fullest and not be bogged down with useless or unnecessary baggage.

The primary reason, I believe, why people bring more luggage than they need when they are traveling is that they are afraid. They are afraid of having to make do with less. They are afraid of being seen in the same outfit more than once. They are afraid of being caught in an untenable or unpredictable position and they want to be prepared for anything and everything.

By contrast, Jesus says to his disciples: “Trust me. Take that which is necessary for your journey, but do not bring more than what you need. Learn how to get along with less, and be prepared for both acceptance and rejection by those you will meet along the way.”

It is, of course, a lesson all of us need both to learn and to remember. Independence is a virtue we give up reluctantly. Interdependence is a value we do not claim readily, and trust is a rare gift, it seems, within the human family.

How, therefore, can we learn and follow the three lessons Jesus gave?

Within the past few weeks, there have been, it would seem, more than the usual number of happenings within our land that gave us notice, or at least reminded us, of our interdependence as God’s creatures and our need to be not independent, but dependent upon God, to place our trust and confidence in God, and then to act on and reflect God’s gracious love to us and all creation.

Starting with the Pope’s encyclical on climate change and moving through the debate on the taking down of the Confederate flag in South Carolina, the murder of nine worshiping Bible-discussants in an African-American-based congregation, the subsequent memorial service in their memory with a reminder from our president that grace . . . while not a usual prime time topic, as more than one commentator noted . . . is not merited or something we deserve but, rather, “the free and benevolent favor of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessing” as he said before he started singing what will probably turn out to be one of the most frequently aired renditions of *Amazing Grace* in our history and on through the awaited rulings by the Supreme Court in support of the Affordable Care Act and Gay Marriage, there was a consistent emphasis on our interdependence as God’s creatures and our needs, followers of Jesus Christ, to be reflective of God’s love and care for us and all God’s people everywhere.

The question that remains, however, is still, “Are we ready?” Are we ready to place our confidence in God and to reflect and share God’s love with everyone? We know what we’re supposed to do. We know what God expects of us. The question is, are we now ready and prepared to do that?

If we are, then well and good. If we are not, what is it that is keeping us from doing so?

Sixteen years ago, in 1999, the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Pastor of Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina in a profile in the *Savannah Morning News*, was quoted as saying, “In life, we are all faced with the opportunity to serve. It is at times a hard choice to make, but those hard choices yield great rewards. Those rewards are mostly for others and not for ourselves. That’s what service is all about.” *“That’s what ‘service’ is all about.”*

As we and others these past several days have mourned the massacre of Pastor and State Senator Clementa Pinckney and the other members of his congregation there in Charleston, hopefully we also have reflected, as Professor Robert Franklin of Emory University has called on all of us to do, on the ongoing role of moral leadership during times of violence and social crisis.

“Moral leaders,” he says, “are women and men who live and lead with integrity and imagination to serve the common good while inviting others to join them. Examples of such moral leadership,” he then goes on to say, “include Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pope Francis,” among others.

“They are human beings,” he explains, “who have devoted themselves to the noble call of doing good. They don’t have to be saints, although no saint will be rejected. They can be fully fleshed, flawed, and ordinary people who behave in extraordinary ways during times of crisis.

“In times of violence,” he continues, “and deep and shocking pain, moral leaders initiate acts of healing and reconciliation with justice to repair distressed communities. Such leaders,” he goes on to say, “facilitate healing by allowing people to grieve and to grieve in the context of a community of caring neighbors.”

He then concludes by saying, Moral leaders listen carefully to grief narratives and create the time and space for people to put pain into words. Amidst their listening, they find opportunities to help grieving communities conceptualize action that may become constructive responses to the violence and their anguish.

“As we learned from South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Process, grief must include and lead to truth telling and reform of public norms, behavior, law and policy. And, as another moral leader, Desmond Tutu often said, Without forgiveness, there is no future.”

Wow!!! Is there any doubt as to what we are called upon to do? Is there anything that is not clear as to what our role as followers of Jesus Christ is to be in our land today? Is there any doubt as to what the concept of "service" is about?

I think not, or at least I hope not.

Jesus has commissioned us to be his followers. He has called us, just as he called his first disciples, to go out into the world around us to proclaim the good news of God's love for all humanity, to show by our words and deeds that we are part of that huge family, to challenge the demonic forces in the world, both here at home, as well as elsewhere, to anoint with oil those who are sick, to show by our presence that we care, and to do all of this with nothing but a walking stick.

Are you ready? If so, well and good. If not, not to worry. Simply come now to the table to receive, through gifts of bread and wine, the courage and the strength you need for ministry in Jesus' name in daily life.

So may it be. Amen