

Building Bridges
Mark 6:1-13
July 8, 2018 – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Our Gospel Lesson today concludes with Jesus sending out the disciples, sending them into the mission field, sending them out in pairs. Now it's striking to me that he told them to take nothing with them but the bare essentials – don't take any food or money or extra clothes. Take the clothes on your back and your walking stick – that's all. Friends, a week ago we returned from our youth mission trip, and I need to tell you, when I go on a mission trip I pack everything but the kitchen sink. I pack half the tools in my garage; and I own a lot of tools. I pack some extra food and clothes. I pack my tablet to stay in touch with the church; and my kindle to read at night. I pack a camera to document our trip. I pack some music, in case I happen to have some free time and I'm near a piano; and I always pack my personal first aid kit. But Jesus told the disciples, "You don't need any of that 'stuff'; just go. Just go." Now, I don't know what the disciples actually took on their mission trip; but the statement that you don't need any of the "stuff" is a statement of faith. Jesus is saying, "Have faith. Have faith that you will be provided for. Have faith that you will be given what you need. Have faith that people will welcome you. Have faith." And, indeed, all mission trips require a certain amount of faith. And I've said it many times before, and I'll say it again, "The primary goal of every mission trip is to share of the love Christ."

If the primary goal of our last mission trip was to rebuild a porch, repair another porch, lay some flooring, do some painting, and yard work and cleaning, we could easily send a check, hire the work out, and stayed home. No... the primary goal of our mission trip was to tell some folks in Buffalo, New York that there are churches and adults and youth in Cleveland, Ohio that love them, that care about them, that are willing to give up a week of their time to work hard to make their lives better, to make them happier, and to let them know how much God loves them.

Friends, Wednesday was the Fourth of July, Independence Day. Two hundred and forty-two years ago this past Wednesday, our country declared independence from Great Britain. As part of my remembrance of this event, I reread the Declaration of Independence in its entirety. "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men [today we would say "that all people"] are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." And, of course, as a United Methodist minister, I found myself contrasting this declaration with the Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church: "To make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." And so, I asked myself, "What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to transform the world?"

If we are called to be a missional church, we are called to go forth, in the name of Christ, sharing the love of Christ while we make lives better, while we support the grounds upon which our great nation was founded: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. And might I suggest, when we as Christians speak of life, liberty, and happiness, we're talking about more than a heart-beat or even freedom from oppression. Paul said it to his church in Corinth: "Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." That's the story of Jesus Christ. That's the amazing news we are called to share; and this is not just about eighteen people going to Buffalo. Two weeks ago a medical mission team from our conference left for the more remote areas of Puerto Rico; and a week ago Wednesday another team led by our District Superintendent left for Cambodia, all intent on serving Christ by bringing life, liberty, and the Good News of the Gospel to people who really need to hear it.

I've told the story before about the farmer who was fighting with his next door neighbor who was his brother. One day, there was a knock on the farmer's door. A stranger, standing there with a bag of tools, said, "I'm a carpenter looking for work. Do you have any work for me?"

The farmer said, "Why yes. The man next door is my brother, but we haven't spoken for years. Look! He even took his bulldozer and dug a ditch between our properties to separate us. I have a stack of lumber next to my barn. I want you to build a solid fence between our properties, so I won't even need to look at him. But I have an appointment in town in an hour."

The carpenter responded, "You go ahead. I understand the job. I'll take care of it."

At the end of the day, the farmer returned home, to find that, instead of a fence, the carpenter had built a bridge over the ditch; and his brother was coming over the bridge with outstretched arms, saying, "Look at you. I dug a ditch, and you built a bridge of reconciliation. It's time we reestablish our relationship."

Friends, we need to build fewer fences and more bridges. Now please don't hear this as a political statement in favor of an unfettered flow of undocumented immigrants across our borders. Of course, we need to have controls in place to prevent a massive in-flow of people that may increase crime or cause a severe drain on society. But I am not in favor of the enforcement of law while totally abandoning any sense of compassion. And that is the official stand of our denomination. Hear this statement from our United Methodist Book of Discipline:

We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the rights of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all. We oppose immigration

policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children, and we call on local churches to be in ministry with immigrant families. (*The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church ¶162H*)

But friends, as unhappy as I am with the immigration policies of our current administration, I'm not simply speaking of the United States of America. I was fairly disheartened when resolutions were defeated at our Annual Conference that simply asked for more study of the Israel/Palestinian situation. I was disheartened when a resolution against Israel's incarceration of Palestinian children without legal representation was defeated. I was disheartened when a member of our Annual Conference actually stood up and stated, "We cannot speak against Israel; they are the only friend we have in the Middle East." I'm not suggesting that Palestine is without fault. But neither is Israel without fault or the United States of America without fault or any other country in the world without fault. And I believe that one of the tasks of the church is to hold our governments, all our governments, accountable for their actions. It is one of the tasks of the church to spread the Good News of faith and hope and love; and yes it is one of the tasks of our church to ensure the unalienable rights endowed by our creator: Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness for all God's children.

So the Gospel tells us, the disciples went out, "they cast out many demons, and they anointed many sick people with oil and many were healed." I've said it before, healing is not just about the absence of disease. Healing is about wholeness – spiritual and emotional health as well as physical health. Healing is about faith and hope and love.

Disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called. We are called to go forth, to make and mature more disciples for the transformation of the world. I'll be saying more about our personal call to transformation next week; but, in fact, our previous hymn said it all:

This is my prayer, O Lord of all earth's kingdoms:
Thy kingdom come; on earth thy will be done.
Let Christ be lifted up 'til all shall serve him,
and hearts united learn to live as one.
O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations;
myself I give thee; let thy will be done.
(*"This Is My Song" UMH #437*)

Disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called. We are called to go forth with the peace and joy of Jesus Christ in our hearts. We are called to go forth and serve. We are called to build bridges to a brighter future for all God's children. We are called to go forth with the love of Jesus Christ on our lips. So go forth, claiming

Christ as your Lord and Savior; indeed, as the Savior of the world. Go forth in peace.

Let us pray:

O Lord,
let us go forth to make disciples for the transformation of the world.
Let thy will be done on earth,
that your people might learn to live as one family,
united in your love.
Amen.

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