

July 4, 2010

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

The Rev'd Elizabeth Shows Caffey, associate rector

Just a few weeks ago, I packed my family for a trip to Houston, Texas to attend my brother's wedding. It is no small feat traveling with a 3 month old and a two year old, much less my husband. In the week leading up to the trip my anxiety continuously increased as I found myself at random, usually inopportune times thinking, I need to remember to bring Madelynn's favorite toy, or Chloe won't ever get to sleep if we forget to bring her swaddling blankets. I finally wrote out a long list of the items we needed to pack, including all of the baby items we would need to survive the five day trip: two pack n plays, three packages of diapers, the double stroller, the portable high chair, books, toys, blankets, baby slings, a bottle warmer, sippy cups and bottles - the list went into two columns and filled a whole page, typed, single-space, 10 point font. Our loaded down Expedition was way over-packed with everything including the kitchen sink! But, once we all adjusted to being in the car together, the trip went really well. Of course while we were in Houston, I don't think we pulled-out half the stuff I had thought would be essential.

Traveling to places unknown and facing new situations brings up all sorts of anxieties. We want to be prepared. We want to know that we can handle whatever situation comes our way. So if you are anything like me you make your lists and you lay out your clothes. You come up with all sorts of contingency plans to help you face any unforeseen situation. And you end up loaded down with stuff. Not just physical stuff, but even heavier stuff: worry, anxiety, and perhaps even a little fear or dread. None of these things that we are carrying around with us are life-giving. These things will not help us on our journey. No matter what we pack, no matter how full we load our suitcases and cars, it will never be enough to prepare us for all situations. There are going to be times when we must set our anxieties aside and trust that no matter how unprepared we are, God who loves us, will provide.

This morning Jesus tells his disciples, "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals." Jesus sends his disciples out to broadcast far and wide the good news of the kingdom of God. The journey will be a difficult one. They are charged to carry nothing with them for their journey, no extra tools, no possessions. They are to be as defenseless as lambs among wolves. There are, however a few essential things that the disciples do bring with them. They bring their generous hearts. Hearts that desire to share the message of the kingdom of God with everyone they meet. They bring their stories, stories that tell of

their experiences of God and of Jesus the Christ. These stories are vital to share with nonbelievers and believers alike so we can all know the love of God. And with their hearts and their stories, they bring with them their faith. The faith in God that they are sharing in towns and villages as they journey on the path that God has set before them. Jesus warns his disciples: carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. Carry nothing that will distract you from what is most important. Carry nothing that might separate you from other people. Carry only what you have to freely share – your heart, your stories, your faith.

Even though we have talked about it in numerous sermons and small group settings, many of us still feel uncomfortable with the word evangelism. It makes us think of preachers on street corners and altar calls and people asking us if we have been saved. We Episcopalians do evangelism in our own way, slightly different from the norm. What were our pilgrims in Rio doing a couple of weeks ago as they visited and shared their experiences with our friends there? And what were our J2A pilgrims doing as they met people on their pilgrimage walk and told their stories? Weren't they evangelizing? Weren't they sharing their hearts and their faith? Weren't they confessing God's love and proclaiming the kingdom of God? We proclaim the kingdom here on this campus each and every time we offer love and companionship to our neighbor and her children as they shop at Threads. We proclaim the kingdom of God when we visit our neighbors in these residential buildings that surround us and invite them to participate in the events on our campus and to join in the life of our community. We proclaim the kingdom of God when we each invite our own neighbors and friends to come with us to church, to share in the love and freedom we experience by being a part of this community and worshipping God in this place. We are evangelists simply by how we live and move in our daily lives in this world. We don't need to carry our bibles or our prayer books with us. We don't need things, things weigh us down. Things don't build relationships. Things don't give and receive love. All we need for this journey of discipleship are our hearts, our minds, and our faith. Those are the real gifts that we have to share with others. Those are the gifts that God gave to all of us. Those are our points for real connection, for real relationship.

Today we celebrate the freedoms that we enjoy by living in this country. We celebrate our freedom, which allows us to worship God and serve God without fear of punishment or retribution. And God calls us out into the world to share God's liberating love for all God's people. In celebrating our freedom, let us honor God's call and freely share our faith, share our stories of God's love for us. Let us set aside our burdensome anxieties and fears, and instead seek out and embrace new opportunities for building relationship by sharing God's love.

Carry nothing for your journey. Trust that God has already given you the gifts to proclaim the kingdom of God.