

Leaving Home

Matthew 10: 5-15

Living the Vision: Pathways of Peace

This is the first Sunday in a very special season in the church's life: Lent. I'll be offering a series of Lenten sermons with the collective title: Living the Vision: Pathways of Peace. The vision is that of *Shalom*, a Hebrew word translated *peace* and much more!

Shalom is the purpose the biblical account offers for the creation of the world including human beings. *Shalom* reflects God's vision for life as Christians perceive it. This is Jesus' vision according to the gospels, a vision that includes justice and compassion all people. Our call, as followers of Jesus, is to live the vision of *Shalom*, to walk the pathway toward peace, and to share this hope with all people, using words when necessary.

Peace, in the view of the Bible, is not only the cessation of violence. Peace is wholeness. It is holistic. It means being connected intimately to God and to each other. Peace in our lives is revealed when we are committed actively to live non-violently, justly, and compassionately. Peace is a large vision of a world that is all free, where none is oppressed and all are living their full potential.

Living the vision of *Shalom* begins with something hard. It begins with leaving home. In Matthew 10: 5-15, Jesus sent his disciples out, away from home, *on the road*. Why did he do that? Was he tired of them and wanted a little time apart? Maybe? Jesus knew the importance of the journey, of leaving home, of blazing your own trail.

Matthew's gospel was organized around five long teaching passages. The first of these was the Sermon on the Mount. Today's text comes from the opening part of the second sermon. Now Jesus did not give five extended teachings or sermons like these. These are examples of his stump speeches. He taught in the rabbinic style using brief parables and aphorisms – short and often witty sayings, really one-liners. He taught in a Q & A (question and answer) style with more emphasis on the Q than the A!

The author of Matthew's gospel collected sayings of Jesus and put together into these extended teaching passages to convey Jesus' message for the first-century church. Jesus gives his disciples instructions and guidelines for a mission trip. These lessons are intended by Matthew to guide the lives and ministries of early Christians. What he tells them is helpful and good for our lives as well. It's good for living the vision of peace, of *Shalom*, every day.

Jesus' instructions include telling them where to go, what to take, and how to behave. Those who have ever gone on a mission trip have probably gotten similar advice from their leaders. Jesus tells them where to go. Don't go far. Occasionally, one of us might feel called to go somewhere around the world, to a foreign land, or even halfway across the country. Mostly, we're called to our own neighborhoods, to people we know, and to a life we know well.

Jesus said, "don't go to convert unbelievers." We'll find the need pretty much right in front of us when we really look. There are plenty of lost and confused people nearby. We can give them words of hope. We can proclaim through words and actions that God is here. So, in light of Jesus' instructions, where do you need to go? Where do you feel called to be?

The second instruction Jesus gives is what to carry. What does a disciple take along? What do you and I need to take with us and, perhaps more important, what don't we need to carry along? We don't need lots of equipment because we are the equipment! We need to take care of the equipment (us). This means adequate nourishment, simple accommodations, and modest people – learning to sort out needs from wants. Taking good care of ourselves includes

learning to be content. In light of Jesus' second instruction, what had you planned to take that you now will leave behind?

Jesus' third instruction is how to behave -- what to do? He tells the disciples to knock on a door. For us, he tells us to find people where they live, but not to make a sale. "Be courteous," he says, "in your greeting. If you are welcomed, be gentle in your conversation." If not, just withdraw quietly. People we encounter, those to whom we minister, are not sales to close or souls to win.

Those we will touch most profoundly, we touch through the Spirit. The Spirit touches others through us. The Spirit also touches us through others. We need to trust the Spirit's touch on us and through us -- sometimes in spite of us. But we must respect people's right to say "No" to our ministry and to us, just as it is our right as well to say "No." Crossroads is not the right approach to being church for everyone, but for many, it is absolutely the right way.

Jesus gave these instructions to his disciples as they prepared to go off on their own to practice what he had been teaching them. They were, at least in a sense, leaving home. You and I can learn the lessons of these instructions every time we leave home, or even leave the house!

The call of the Holy for our lives most often is the call to see what's right in front of us. God calls us to love who's standing right there. At the same time, God call us to be on a journey. The forty days of Lent are for us like Jesus' forty days in the wilderness period and like Israel's forty years wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt.

Forty is a highly symbolic number. Forty signifies a pilgrimage, a rite of passage -- the journey from where we were to where we will be, from who we were to who we are becoming. All the significant journeys of our lives begin with leaving home, leaving what is familiar and, often, comfortable. This is not necessarily a geographical leaving, though that often happens. But there is always a cost. The deep truth built into life is a paradox: that we must leave home to find ourselves.

We're beginning a Lenten journey, a pilgrimage together. What leaving of home is calling you? What journey lies in front of you today? Nothing profoundly new can happen in our lives without letting go, leaving home, entering the wilderness, being on pilgrimage. This is the difficult path the Gospels set before every disciple: the narrow gate, the winding road.

Crossroads Church left home eight years ago and formed a new faith community. We have had to step up and step out into new territory throughout these years, often leaving what has become familiar about ourselves to find what is new. There are groups and individuals in this congregation who are on journeys of discovery -- pilgrimages of stretching themselves and finding new ways, new understandings, and new challenges. God always invites us to move farther into the *new*. Opening ourselves to the new means learning to know God and ourselves in new ways. That is the price to pay to see the true self more clearly.

The last word today is a word of challenge. There is always a judgment day! I don't believe in a punitive God like a judge in a criminal court, condemning people to eternal punishment. But there are always consequences. Our lives are meaningful. They have an effect on others' lives and on this world like the ripple effect of an object dropped in a pool of water, sends out ripples. This is image of our lives. They do matter in this world.

There is also, I believe, some cosmic consequence in how we live. Our living affects life itself far beyond our understanding, yet in a way that is very tangible. How you and I live our lives does matter from the smallest and least consequential child whose life may be cut short in

obscure poverty all the way to the most powerful and influential person in government, industry, or even religion.

How this congregation lives its life as church also has a profound effect on the world. I don't understand just how that works. There is a profound opportunity present in the life of this congregation to express God's freedom. We express this freedom as a concrete community of people living, working, and worshipping together. Crossroads is like an engine empowering the lives of each of us, helping us to step out and risk discovering and living our dreams – to risk leaving home. When we live with that sense of freedom and faith, our lives sing a new song -- a song of praise to the God of freedom. Let us sing to God a new song. Let us sing with the voice of our very lives and, when necessary, we'll even use words!