

## **Pentecost 7B – Lectionary 14 – 07/07/2024**

After one of our pastors left back home, I tried to fill in some of the gaps. I was home from college and had a great deal of energy. The council president sat me down and said that sometimes when you are from the church, it can be difficult for people to see where you are now as they may only remember you as you were growing up. Thus, maybe I should back off.

So, I can relate at least a little bit to where Jesus was coming from. Jesus and his disciples had come back to Nazareth where Jesus had grown up. On the sabbath, Jesus began to teach in the synagogue. Many who were there were astounded. They were wondering where and when did he learn all of this. What deeds of power were being done by his hands!

Then they began to think, now wait a minute, is this not the carpenter's son, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon. His sisters are here too. This is the only places that Jesus' brothers were named and that there is a mention of sisters. The person who is not mentioned is Joseph, his earthly father. This may have been to reemphasize the fact that Mary had been a teenager when she had Jesus as well as the fact that Joseph was not the biological father.

One minute the people were astounded, the next they were taking offense that Jesus was trying to be a leader in the Jewish faith in his hometown. Jesus said, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their family and in their own house." So, Jesus was now identifying himself also as a prophet." Someone who speaks for God and reminds them of God's message.

As they would not accept him and his teaching, he was not able to do a lot of ministry there. Although, he was able to lay hands on a few sick people and cure them. Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of the people in his hometown. This must have disappointed Jesus. Here were the people that he grew up with and they were rejecting him. That can hurt.

The people in his hometown and his family missed out on so much. I wonder what they were scared of. They were allowing what they knew of Jesus' family and childhood to cloud their ability to learn and receive what Jesus had to offer in the present. It clouded their ability to see and embrace who Jesus had become. Jesus had grown as a person, but it seemed the people in his hometown and his family were stuck in an image of Jesus from his childhood, as opposed to a person that had matured and come into more of their authentic self.

As human beings, it is easy for us to get stuck and hold on to things that really are not pertinent today. I believe God is trying to reshape the church. We

have a new commission in the ELCA that has begun this work, but that will take years to process and formulate a new structure. There are many churches, not Faith, that expect to only be able to pay a pastor full time for a few more years. There are a few who are able to see this reality, but there are many who are not.

One of my colleagues in Pennsylvania said his church uses \$50,000 a year from their memorial/endowment fund to maintain their budget. They have 200,000 left and they are painting the inside of the church and talk about doing fund raisers. The treasurer continues to point out the financial issues, but the leadership does not want to deal with it.

We at Faith, have a wonderful facility, but we know it takes a fair amount of money to keep it going. Our mortgage is gone, and we are down two staff people at the present time. Anxiety levels are up, but God has blessed us with so many gifts. Sometimes anxiety can become baggage too and get in the way of using the gifts God has given us.

I continue to see God working here at Faith. People are pulling together to continue to do ministry. Once again I believe we need to breathe and just deal with what is necessary right now at this time.

As we move on in our Gospel lesson, Jesus may be challenging us to look at how we do ministry. Now, I will be the first one to say that we need a plan, a structure in which to work, but not a complicated one. This is still a time for us to look at how we operate and to ask God how to make our ministries even more effective in order to glorify God.

Jesus called his twelve disciples together and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey, except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not two tunics. A pretty stripped down version for traveling through the villages. Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits.

They went out and proclaimed that all should repent. The disciples were able to cast out many demons, and anointed the sick with oil and cured them. If people did not welcome them and/or refused to hear them, Jesus told them to shake the dust off their feet and leave.

The disciples were not out saying, because you have been healed, we need to see you at the synagogue. Their mission was to connect with the people and meet the needs that they could meet. For them it was going out and sharing their authentic self with people.

Jesus knew what he had taught them while they had been together. He didn't hold an extra training session for hours on end, he just sent them out to do what he

had already taught them to do. In order for this ministry to happen it didn't take a complicated system or structure. They just went.

My philosophy has always been that we need a game plan that is flexible. I believe Jesus calls us to have a user-friendly structure that supports the ministries that we are called to do. The council, here at Faith will be working on this. So, are we to wait for the restructuring of our ministries? Of course not.

We have two ministries that time and energy are focused on. I have no doubts God is calling us to do these ministries. But yet how are they technically connected to the church? Also, as important and effective as they are, they still do not connect us directly with the community. Jesus sent his disciples to go out and be with the people. I believe that is what our challenge is here at Faith. How can we connect with people directly in our neighborhood?

Jesus is calling us today to try and let go of our baggage. This is our hard set expectations. This is our digging in our heels to change. The church is never going to be what it used to be. Actually, it will be something new and exciting. People are connecting to the spiritual part of their lives in different ways today. It does not always include a church building. Thus, I believe Jesus is calling us to connect with people outside the doors of our church.

In the past, social issues have taken Faith outside the doors and still does today. Today we are reminded that we are called to take what we have been taught and go out and share it. Jesus authorizes us as his disciples. There will be people who do not want to hear what is good news for us. That is okay. Jesus says move on.

We are called to identify what our baggage is and get rid of it. Jesus felt an urgency to get out his message and ministry. This is even after he was rejected in his home town. The urgency has not stopped. Jesus challenges us to go out and connect with people with the message of God's love and acceptance.

Let us pray, Jesus, we do not understand all of the changes that are taking place today in the church and outside of it. What people used to be interested in has changed. We ask that the Spirit would first of all help us identify the baggage that we need to get rid of in order to be ready to go outside the doors of this building and then remind us that you have given us the authority to go out and share the good news of your love and acceptance.

In Jesus' name, Amen