

Proper 11b 2021
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
July 18, 2021

2 Samuel 7:1-14a Psalm 89:20-37 Ephesians 2:11-22 Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The disciples who Jesus had sent out to heal people came back ... and for the very first time, named as apostles. Mark is again pointing us to the future: with an apostle being an eyewitness to Jesus' crucifixion, we are hearing about those people so close to Jesus that they will be with him all the way to the cross, and into resurrection life! It is the disciples, then apostles, who have handed down the faith over these thousands of years. Thousands!

"The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught." **We** spend time with Jesus, go into the world, come home to Redeemer, to worship and praise God, to tell all that we have done and taught and experienced in the name of Christ. (Because we are post-resurrection people. We go forth in the name of the risen Christ.) When we have worked hard, done our best to proclaim the gospel, to bring healing to the world, to be the hands and feet of Jesus, we get to the end of a particular journey ... and Jesus encourages us to "go to a deserted place and rest awhile." We need to refresh ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. In the time of Mark, the crowds would not leave the apostles alone. Those in need of healing "hurried there on foot and arrived ahead of them." The world, starved for healing, brought everyone they could to Jesus. There was no rest.

Last week I inquired where you find God in quarantine, pandemic times. For everything that we have been through over about eighteen months, you – we – me, too! – have a deep need to both be together in Christ, to tell our stories, to heal ourselves and one another, ... and to go to a deserted place and rest awhile. And the crowds of our culture and of our hearts will not leave us alone. Perhaps it is only Jesus who has made it to a place apart from the crowds to pray.

Sometimes right now we are those crowds. We want all of Jesus, all of Redeemer, everything fond and familiar in our hearts and bodies and prayers, to return. And we have been in the world, in the desert, wandering, (our long Lenten, desert time) and we have deep laments that we may not even know how to express. We have the joy and challenges of entire families living and working and going to school ... at home. We have the heartache of broken plans and a deep longing to be with friends and family with whom we could not gather, could not hug or share tears and laughter, ... life stories. We are full of things to express about our "sent out" time ... sent out in quarantine, in service perhaps in unknown ways. It was so very difficult.

Now we are back, and in our longing, we need **healing** from our extended pandemic time ... from dreams set aside, from time we cannot regain, from things of deep meaning – corporate praise, worship, and prayer, casual fellowship with familiar faces ... and our world, even here, is new. In some ways, we are the crowds pressing on Jesus and the apostles: heal us, heal us, ... we long to be like we were before ... come, back, Lord Jesus!

We are not the same ... and in some ways, will not be the same "as before." Some of our dear friends and family are no longer here. We have new faces and families here – welcome – we long to embrace you! – and still, we lament, crave healing. We want our pew, our friends, music, a big choir, full pews, the body **and** blood of Christ. I believe that we are still learning about our

deep yearning for Jesus, for knowing that God's Word is sufficient, and that we long so much more to be filled ... with Christ, Jesus, God. In this time, smaller things catch our attention: the rector is sitting somewhere else; there is a deacon in our midst, and we're not sure we need one ... she's in Catherine's chair ... and what of lectors and acolytes and ... us?

My beloveds, Jesus is with us. Our lament is not about a chair. Or a deacon. Our "our" pew. We have been thrown off kilter, and are learning in some very painful ways that the only way we are healed is through Jesus. We are companions on this journey. Remember the many times we hear: "do not be afraid. I am with you." Do not be afraid. Jesus is with us! A deacon will add to our worship and to our life in Jesus Christ. She is here out of her deep love of service in the name of the Lord. Deacons help us reach out to a world that Jesus looks upon with compassion, because God's people without a shepherd are here, are nearby in the surrounding neighborhoods, and might not even know that there is a shepherd who loves them beyond measure. And us? We know people who are trying to feed themselves on whatever the world has to offer: money, stock profits, vacations, designer everything from shoes to clothing to groceries, picked and preserved for their uniformity, not sustenance and value. Donations given for tax benefits only and not in thanksgiving for our abundance. This sort of life is a life of isolation much longer lasting than our quarantine; we, too, need to lean fully into the shepherd who will feed us, guide us, and show us abundance in what we see as a desert. Come along, friends, and be fed. Come along, and stop starving, if you are, in a time of plenty. Know the love in Jesus Christ, know his role of sending us out ... and gathering us together. In sharing with us, in deep compassion, that he knows that we can be living like sheep without a shepherd. Our shepherd is here, always.

Part of our coming together is not giving in to the demands of the crowds, of the world around us, of claiming abundance in a worldview of scarcity, of claiming love in a culture of not-love, of saying YES to prayer and quiet times with God in order that we remember **whose** we are and **who** gives us life. Let's continue opening in a way that looks at what we need, what gives our life together meaning in the name of Christ, in the name of Jesus, proclaiming our awesome God and the power of the Holy Spirit. It is all ours to caretake, friends, God's kingdom here, now. Move prayerfully, lovingly into our present and future, with the One who loves us and calls us together for times to pray.

I am so very grateful to be part of the journey of this body of Christ. Now, go and tell ... and come back and tell ... about finding the presence of God ... in every place. Follow Jesus, who took time apart from the world, to pray. Amen. Alleluia!