

**Readings:** Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 69:7-10 [11-15] 16-18; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

Grace to you and peace from Jesus the Christ. Amen.

There's a timeless Zen proverb that says it all in just four words: "After enlightenment, the laundry."<sup>1</sup> There is a sense this Sunday – this Second Sunday after Pentecost – that it's time to *get back to work*.

What do you do in the church in the time *after* several weeks of hearing the good news echo from wall to wall in an empty tomb – the good news that Christ is risen, that God has conquered death through love? What do you do in the time *after* this good news culminates and climaxes with the Spirit of God blowing up the church on Pentecost Sunday with diverse tongues of fire? How do you follow up a celebration (last week's Holy Trinity Sunday) – the only celebration based on a doctrine rather than a Bible story. What do you *do* in the time *after all of this*?

*The laundry.* Time to *get back to work*. Time to live in *ordinary* time, as it's called: these weeks which start today and take us through summer all the way to late fall. These weeks when you look at the top of your bulletin and underneath the date, week after week you find the word "*after*." Second Sunday *after* Pentecost. Third Sunday *after* Pentecost. Fourth and Fifth and Sixth and Seventh Sunday *after* Pentecost.

Sounds boring, I know, but then again, as far as I can recall, Jesus never promised the life of a disciple to be always and evermore *exciting* or *enlightening*.

But there is a promise implied that these days *after* the excitement of Easter and *after* Pentecost; that these days might contain both challenge and comfort – enough to sustain the journey ahead.

Because the words from Matthew's Gospel for today, are words that come *after* these words: "Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness."

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Peter L. Steinke's *A Door Set Open – Grounding Change in Mission and Hope* (Alban Institute, 2010), p. 117.

The words Jesus speaks today are in the midst of the disciples getting ready to be sent out – they’re doing laundry, they’re fretting about getting organized, they’re making piles of all the stuff they think they’ll need as they try to stuff all their excitement for the journey ahead into one or two suitcases (or maybe that’s me I’m thinking about).

But then *after* those words come these words: “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions...”

And then *after* a laundry list of things to *do* (go to the lost sheep, proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons) and *after* a laundry list of things *not to take* (take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff) and *after* a laundry list of challenges the disciples might face (they will hand you over to their councils and flog you, you will be dragged before governors and kings, you will be hated by all because of my name)...

*After* these laundry lists of laundry lists, then Jesus finally speaks the words we hear in our Gospel reading for today. Words of what it means to do the hard work of discipleship – being a *disciple*, which remember means being a “learner” or a “student.”

“A disciple is not above the teacher,” our Gospel reading for today begins, which means the disciple is not an expert or the one who has all the answers or the one who knows what lessons lie ahead. The disciple is simply the one who is open to growth, open to change, open to the journey ahead, open to learn that you might actually be wrong about something, open to wandering in the dark for a time, open to learning lessons in the midst of doing the laundry.

A cartoon pictures a mother “holding the hand of her little daughter” as the “mother instructs the girl: ‘Remember, when life gives you lemons, be sure you *pout, cry, and complain until life can’t take the whining anymore and instead gives you cookies just to shut you up.*’”<sup>2</sup>

Can we agree this is most certainly not what it means to be a student, a learner, a follower of Jesus.

---

<sup>2</sup> Again, quoted in Peter Steinke’s *A Door Set Open*, p. 120 (emphasis mine).

But being a disciple of Jesus also doesn't mean: 'Oh, just suck it up (pick up your cross) and deal with it!' Nor does it even mean: 'Ah, when life gives you lemons, just make lemonade' (although perhaps here, we're getting a *little* closer).

But more importantly, there are words and lessons and promises of comfort, peppered throughout today's Gospel reading, sprinkled amidst the words of challenges.

"Have no fear of them," Jesus says. "Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered." "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul..." "Even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven."

Words of promise that there is nothing to fear. Words of comfort that a simple word of acknowledgment will be enough not to earn your way to God's good grace, but *enough* to be a disciple, a learner of Jesus the teacher.

Oh, there are other words in the laundry list of what it might mean to be a disciple. Words of conflict. Words of danger and distress. Words that sound like '*fightin' words*' as my dad would call them (*Them's fightin' words!* He would say). But as Jesus hangs everything up on the laundry line of life, they are all words which are grounded, planted firmly in the way of the cross: "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Then again, don't think for a minute that you have to travel to the ends of the earth to serve God. Don't think that you have to pack up all your belongings and then leave them behind to follow Jesus. Don't think that life and discipleship and gathering for worship are only about the exciting, enlightening moments of clarity far from home and family.

I know, I'm not a very good example of this right now – this being a disciple in ordinary time and space – since I've accepted a new call at a place (Holden Village) which you can fairly accurately describe as "the end of the earth" and it's true that our family is in the process currently of packing up our belongings and leaving a good chunk of them in storage and I'll be honest, I'm not doing as well as anyone else at finding meaning in the day to day work of ordinary time or this time marked by the word "*after*."

I'll be honest, this is exactly the place I'm learning these days and growing what it means to be a disciple and following in the ways of the cross throughout *ordinary time* and "*after*" time.

Things like... Laundry, dishes, weekly worship, attending to the needs of campers or tourists, raising children, fixing houses, fixing relationships, staying sober, staying clean, writing a letter to a friend, cleaning out the inbox...

It's tempting to look at those disciples of old and think that you might not be called to attend to the laundry that needs hanging in your backyard, but listen to the words of Kathleen Norris in a lesser known book she wrote (its subtitle is fantastic: *Laundry, Liturgy and 'Women's Work'*). She writes:

It is a paradox of human life that in worship, as in human love, it is in the routine and the everyday that we find the possibilities for the greatest transformation. Both worship and housework often seem perfunctory. And both, by the grace of God, may be anything but. At its Latin root, *perfunctory* means "to get through with," and we can easily see how liturgy, laundry and what has traditionally been conceived of as "women's work" can be done in that indifferent spirit. But the joke is on us: what we think we are only "getting through" has the power to change us, just as we have the power to transform what seems meaningless – the endless repetition of a litany or the motions of vacuuming a floor. What we dread as mindless activity can free us, mind and heart, for the workings of the Holy Spirit.

"*Going to the lost sheep*" might mean attending to the needs of campers or tourists in this *ordinary time of 'after.'* "*Proclaiming the good news*" might mean writing a letter to a friend in this *ordinary time of 'after.'* "*Curing the sick*" or "*raising the dead,*" "*cleansing the lepers*" and "*casting out demons*" might mean fixing a house or a relationship, staying sober or clean, or just doing the laundry or dishes or gathering together for about an hour to pray and sing, listen and talk, offer and receive,  *dwell together in the ordinary and just maybe touch (or be touched by) the extraordinary presence of God*, lose oneself in this gathering and find that in the losing you mysteriously find enough to go out finally, with nothing to fear.

Oh, there's lots more that Jesus has to say in our reading today and there is good news of both challenge and comfort in our other readings as well, but being a disciple doesn't mean having it all figured out. It means learning along the way and being open.

So brothers and sisters in Christ – having been *called, gathered, enlightened, and opened to the holy* – go out, take up your cross (with joy and laughter and awe) and let's do laundry for the Lord. Amen.