



GPS GUIDE: MAY 15, 2022

G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Sermon: Being Commissioned

As we move through this season of stewardship, we ask that you spend a few moments in thoughtful reflection each day. Find a quiet moment, center your heart, notice the world around you, and pray this giving prayer as we build “a future with hope” together.

Prayer: Holy One: Over and over, we become scattered and separated. Over and over, like a good shepherd, you find us and bring us home. For all the togetherness you’ve granted us at FCC Birmingham, thank you. For the gift of faith that gets us through times of separation, thank you. For the gifts of connection and community, mission and ministry, hope and commitment, thank you. In your generosity and grace, O God, grant me the wisdom to see what I can give to deepen our faith, strengthen our community, extend our witness, and build a future with hope. Amen.

Monday: Read John 1: 6-8; 19-28

The text for today tells us more about who John wasn’t than about who he was: he wasn’t the light; he wasn’t the Messiah; he wasn’t Elijah; he wasn’t the prophet. Who, then, was he? He was a witness (John 1:7) and he was a voice (John 1:23) - a voice telling people to prepare for someone else, someone whose sandal thong John was unworthy to untie (John 1:28). John himself is represented as directing his followers to Jesus and as declaring that “he must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). It is not just what John the Baptist says about Jesus that is important, but how he says it. John is a witness who testifies to the good news of Jesus Christ. Those two words are used more than forty-five times in John’s Gospel. John is only the first of many to testify on behalf of Jesus in this Gospel (see John 4:39; 5:36, 37, 39; 12:17; 15:26, 27- you’ll look one of these up at the end of this devotion). The church is sent into today’s world as a witness. We are called to be audacious enough to believe that the gospel is true, and that it must be proclaimed boldly, publicly, and confidently. In addition, if we follow John the Baptist’s example, we will bear witness to this truth with humility. For John, that meant directing people away from himself and toward Jesus. Notice how people try not to let him do that. “Who are you? What do you say about yourself?” (John 1:22). What do you think it means for you to be a witness who testifies on behalf of Jesus Christ? Look up one of the other

passages above listed as reference to others testifying on behalf of Jesus. How can you testify to the light of Christ through your words? Your actions?

Tuesday: Read Mark 1: 14-20

In Mark's Gospel, we read the story of how the first four disciples are called by Jesus. In a remarkable 4 verses, these fishermen leave their nets, their security, and their families to follow Jesus. I know that I would want at least 48 hours to think through my decision, to weigh the consequences, to think about the family business and the implications of the career move. Of course, by the time I had done all that, Jesus would have moved on to the next town. Mark tells us nothing of their inner deliberations, whether the fishing was good or bad, if they were religious people or not. Mark merely says, "And immediately, they followed him." This connecting phrase, "and immediately," is the most common phrase in Mark's Gospel, occurring 33 times in only 16 chapters. The immediacy of Mark's Gospel is contained in the simple message Jesus delivers in Mark 1:14, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus does not spend a lot of time analyzing the big picture. His program is not very detailed. He didn't write a two-volume manifesto about how the world works. He is more intent on telling us God's picture of the world: God is near, God's power is at work, hear this good news and follow me. Do you sometimes wonder if our obsessions with social media, or comparing ourselves, or climbing the ladder of success are just ways of protecting ourselves from the simple, life-changing power of the call of Christ? "Love your neighbor as yourself. Feed the hungry, house the homeless and you have done it to me. Abide in my love and I will abide in you. You are the light of the world, so let your light shine before all that they may see the glory of God. The reign of God is among you, within you. If you have faith, the mountain shall be moved for you." How could those first disciples not follow him? As Peter said, "O Master, now that we have seen you, where else can we go?" How could we not also follow?

Wednesday: Read Exodus 3: 1-15

Did you notice what happens when God wants to send Moses on a holy mission? Moses raises an objection - "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" In fact, Moses raises four objections (3:11, 3:13; 4:1, 4:10) before saying flat out, "O my Lord, please send someone else" (4:13)! Seminary professor David Lose has this reminder as we read Exodus: Faith is a full contact, participation sport. You just can't sit back and expect to really know God, you have to get up off the couch and get in the game, take a risk, try something marvelous, reach for something you thought unachievable, step out onto the winding road the end of which you can't see from your doorstep. As you read the story of Moses' sending, here's a question: Where do you believe God is calling you? It doesn't have to be spectacular. Remember, when done in faith, there is no small gesture! Perhaps what makes this question challenging is that most of us don't see ourselves as the stuff of which faith-heroes are made. But that's probably because we haven't been reading our Bibles very carefully. After all, very few of the characters God employs — including Moses — are the stuff of heroes. And yet God uses these frail, fallible, and oh so ordinary people, over and over again, to do extraordinary things. So, I'll ask again: Where do you think God might be calling you right now? Where is God calling our church? What would it look like for us to stop raising objections to God's call in our lives and in our church?

Thursday: Read John 20:21

Have you ever been locked in? In her book, *Any Day a Beautiful Change*, Katherine Pershey describes what it's like to be locked into a prison of fear: Fear is a physiological response to tomorrow. It is almost always about death. Fear causes us to live in a perpetual state of anxiety. Fear is exhausting and depressing. Generally, the calamities I expect do not come to pass. So I replace them with new ones. Time and energy that could be used constructively, for prayer, dishwashing, learning to quilt, I sacrifice to cultivate apprehension (The Christian Century, "High Anxiety: The Terror of the Dark Unknown," March 7, 2012; partial paraphrase). Have you ever been locked out? Locked out is how we feel when we read poverty statistics and wonder how things will ever change. Locked out is how those being discriminated against feel when they look at the worlds that are open to those who aren't. There are no walls thick enough to block the entry of the Risen Christ into the safe room the disciples had created at the center of their fears. The resurrected Christ who passes through locked doors is the same one who shows the disciples his hands and his side (20:20). He has a body, and he has come into our locked rooms, not just to visit, but bearing gifts that can heal a hurting, hostile world.

- The first gift Jesus offers is **peace**. Three times in this passage he says, "Peace be with you." It is at the same time both an ordinary greeting and an extraordinary greeting.
- The second gift Jesus brings is **purpose**. New Testament scholar Robert Kysar puts it well when he says: Christ's peace is not a passive contentment. He gives the disciples a second gift, a mission. Believers now become apostles because Christ sends them into the world. God's sending Christ is the pattern for Christ's sending the disciples. They are sent out of God's love for the world and for the world's redemption.
- The third gift Jesus gives us is **power**. John's Pentecost involves no rowdy crowd and no tongues of fire. John's Pentecost is just a resurrected savior with a spiritual body who can pass through walls breathing the Spirit into our tired, fearful bodies. "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn. 20:23).

When does Jesus come with this peace, purpose and power? When people are locked in grief and fear like the disciples. We are called to leave the rooms we've locked ourselves in and go out, emboldened by the knowledge that we bear the peace, purpose, and power of one who bears the scars of his own pain, and can pass through any walls that lock us in or out.

Friday: Read Isaiah 6: 1-8

The call of Isaiah happens in dramatic detail! Isaiah says, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'" And Isaiah's response is, "Here am I; send me!" This is a phrase we well know from the much beloved hymn *Here I Am, Lord*. Today, read and meditate on the words to this hymn. How is God at work in the verses? As you meditate on the chorus, what are the important aspects of responding to God's question *Whom shall I send?*

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Chorus

Here am I, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my words to them. Whom shall I send?

Chorus

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will send the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide, till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Chorus

Saturday: Read Jeremiah 29:10-14

This is our focus scripture for the stewardship series. You've heard it a few times by now. As you read through it today, think about God's promises to God's people. Pray about how you can be part of God's promise to bring about a future of hope in our community. Tomorrow, we will bring our pledge cards forward during the closing hymn. Our combined gifts will make a difference as we are sent by God to ensure a future of hope for all God's people.

Today, if you have not already done so, spend time in prayer about what God is calling you to pledge toward the ministries at First Christian Church. Then, fill out your pledge card (or make your pledge online at fcc-bhm.org/pledge) and bring it to church tomorrow.