

How can we trust when we are empty?

Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19; Matthew 9:35-10:14

Take nothing. Go to people in need bring them good news and if they don't receive it, peacefully walk away. This is the call Jesus gives to the disciples; those twelve and those who follow the twelve. What a hard call; to continue these practices when we meet resistance, when to continue these practices we must go against the grains of our culture, neighborhood, society. Most difficult. What if these practices go against our grain, challenge our safety, our knowledge, our presumption? Why practice faith at all when it seems like the world is falling apart? Sabbath is a continual call to re-engage our faith.

The commandment in the Hebrew scriptures given because of the wonders of creation and the wonders of a divine presence, a maker who rests. A commandment given to help slaves who for generations had been told they were only tools for the empire. A commandment to them to say you will need to completely change how you see the world, you will have to teach your children things that you never learned, you will have to value things you never were taught to value and believe things about yourself you were never taught to be true. The Hebrew slaves are pushed out into the wilderness by both their desire for freedom and God's call to new life and yet they were so fragile people of all ages, having had no chance to pack anything, find themselves in a world where no one is telling them what to do, when to do it. No one is giving them quotas about how much to gather, how much to produce. An invisible living God is instead inviting them to make decisions for the best of their health and the health of their community. This God even goes so far as to say that the most vulnerable in your midst will be given priority and that every Sabbath day not only you but every creature around you and every human in your community, stranger, friend, you all will rest. You will all practice the discipline of packing lightly and resting easy.

Have you been feeling fragile lately? Perhaps you've been feeling like you've been pushed into an arena where you are supposed to change what you know to be true. This is why we send small children to school because their minds are flexible and when we tell them that the most important thing to learn is addition and subtraction and then a few years later we say well actually no it's all about division and then when they get into high school we tell them again no it's actually all about algebra, chemistry, biology and we teach them to go with the flow. We teach them to study

and learn break the mold. Somewhere along the line it becomes harder to learn, not only because perhaps the brain neurons are slowing down a touch but because they are less flexible. Have you learned anything over the last few weeks that has startled you, made you feel fragile?

The most powerful book I read this year was 'White Fragility' and I wish I could say I read it and knew everything in it already. But instead I read it and I thought, oh that is why I get defensive when I'm not included in a conversation, that is why I get defensive when someone says that currently black lives matter is a more important message than all lives matter. How can that be? It touches a fragility in me that wants to be in control, to know what is right and not have to learn anything new. I believe this is one of the reasons that God made Sabbath a regular occurrence. There are practices in the Hebrew scripture that God prescribes to happen every seven years or every 50 years, but not Sabbath. Sabbath should happen so often that you do not forget it's coming up, that you do not forget the last time you had a Sabbath. Why? Because God wants us to practice, be reminded repeatedly of a few things.

Pack lightly. The Hebrew slaves were told to gather up the food they would receive every day, to gather up what they needed but no more. If they kept food back hoping that it might do them the next day, that food would rot, unless one time a week they were together two of what they needed and overnight the food would remain good, so that they would have a day where they could eat without gathering. God does not promise us rose gardens. God does promise us the provision of hope and meaning. Whether we are amid joy or sorrow and if we gather too much up and we forget to go out each day to gather anew something begins to mould, to go bad. God wants us to renew ourselves each day in prayer, worship, scripture reading and relationships. Packing lightly is also a reminder of one of the main themes of our Hebrew scriptures which is you are not a commodity. The slaves have been commodities in Hebrew scriptures for generations to the Pharaoh. He would look upon them and ensure that he got excess of what he was given. They would get rationed food and need to give him more and more each year out of the same number of slaves, same amount of straw; the Pharaoh wanted more. What was he doing with the more? He was building barns to store the money he was saving as he wasn't spending it on his people. Packing lightly means shopping lightly. One of the great lessons of the pandemic for those of us in the western world who are used to walking into spaces with shelves more than full is that some days I walk in to the grocery store and not all of the shelves are full. I hope you know that much of the world does that all the time. They don't have grocery stores. They go into the market and see what may be available. If you get there late it's gone. We are so used to in Canada having so much that we felt just betrayed by the fact we may need to go a week. Packing lightly means remembering that all we need are the essentials. That God does not ask us to buy more for the economy and God does not ask us to hoard more. That we are always to bring with us what we need and trust. Trust and give away our excess. We are also to rest easy.

When Jesus calls his disciples and sends them out, he says now you're going to go do some work on the bad days I need you to not blame yourself and not blame the other. I need you to shake off your shoes, breathe in peace and take it with you. The place you leave will not be abandoned by God, but it is obviously a place that you are not being listened to and so walk on. And do not take with you a resentment that someone didn't listen to you do not take with you are resentment that you could have done better and begin to feel that guilt that eats away. Now this is a classic Jesus commandment. Go and do it he says and luckily, he knows that we are never going to get this perfect, but we are asked to try. And so, resting easy also means forgiving ourselves for when we forget to rest easy. We also need to rest easy that we're not called to save the whole world. That at times we will be called into places. So, for example Jesus oddly says don't go talk to those people, talk to those people and when I first read this, I thought now is Jesus dissing the Gentiles; like why don't they need him. Yeah I want Jesus to say that all lives matter because then I can rest and not worry, but what Jesus is saying is there are times in your life when you will be called to not go everywhere, you will be called to go to a particular place and a particular people because they are the ones who are most open or most needful or they are the place where God is going to surprise you and help you learn and it actually has nothing to do with the people you went to see, but about you becoming a more mature disciple of Christ. Practice Sabbath, pack light, rest easy, breathe in the peace of God for it is steadfast it is for all people. Hallelujah and Amen.