

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 10:1-11,16-20

Isaiah 66:10-14

Psalm 66:1-8

Galatians 6:1-16

July 3, 2022

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

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How many of you have found yourself in a situation where you really wanted to shake the dirt off of your feet and move on, putting a hurtful relationship in the rearview mirror? We've all been there. And, most likely, we have also wondered if shaking the dust off and moving on was the Christian thing to do.

What are we called to do when faced with rejection, complicity, hatred, anger, or abuse? It's a pivotal question and one that seems to be so central to the world we are living in today. Whether it's a personal relationship that has been harmful or a larger held community belief that has caused division, it is so difficult to figure out how we are called to navigate the hurt we are experiencing.

When do we shake the dust off and move on?

Let me suggest that we start with the act of blessing. Blessing as our foundational belief for how we approach those hurtful or harmful situations.

We begin our service each week with these words, "Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." And we respond, "And blessed be God's kingdom now and forever." The act of *blessing* is the first intent that we proclaim each and every week we gather for worship. It's the beginning, the thing that grounds us, the basic starting point of our faithful desire to follow Christ.

And, I want us to use this faithful desire to bless, as the backdrop for gaining a deeper understanding of two of our texts this morning – Paul's letter to the church in Galatia and our Gospel from Luke – so that we can wrestle with the dust from those hurtful situations that we may be wanting to shake off.

In Luke, Jesus tells his disciples that there are going to be times that it is perfectly justifiable to dust their feet off and turn away from a harmful situation. He acknowledges dead ends within relationships. No matter how much we build those relationships on the intent of blessing, that blessing may at times fall on hardened hearts. And, if you have experienced those kind of dead ends when you have given your heart to reconciliation or peace building, you may read this text and say...thank you, Jesus! That's just the permission to walk away that I was hoping for.

Taken as a standalone text, we might stop right here with Luke and find ourselves with an easy way out of conflict. Dismissing those troublesome individuals or circumstances and never

looking back. We may think...whew...we can still be faithful Christians and walk away from unsavory situations.

But, our texts are never to be taken alone or prooftexted as justification for a preferred outcome or to justify our inaction within any given situation. Our texts are part of a much larger whole that together help us navigate what it means to be faithful followers of Christ. With that in mind, consider why Galatians may have been offered this week as a companion text to our Gospel.

In Galatians, Paul is teaching the church to always seek to do right, to not give up, to seek good for everyone, in every situation. He doesn't mention dusting his feet off or turning away. Paul seems to teach that we are to keep blessing no matter the circumstances. But, if you have found yourself in a harmful or hurtful situation you know that is easier said than done.

So, how do we balance these two teachings?

First, let's go back to those opening words of our liturgy. The words of blessing. When we say those words we are responding to God's love for us by calling God blessed. We honor God. And then we call God's kingdom blessed. And, by doing so, we proclaim our faithful intention to live into this blessedness, to work to bring blessedness to God's entire creation, to one another, now and forever. We start our liturgy with this promise and this commitment.

And so, when Jesus is calling forth the 70 disciples in Luke, he is calling them forth with this same commitment, a commitment to honoring and living out blessedness.

Jesus directs them: "5Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" That's the blessing. And then he says, "6And if anyone is there who shares in peace, (who desires to be blessed) your peace will rest on that person..." In other words, the giving and receiving of blessing provides a path so that together you may commit to building a loving caring community. You may commit to things like goodwill, reconciliation, loving kindness, unconditional love.

That's the intent of Jesus' teaching. Start with the invitation of blessing. Open your heart.

But, Jesus recognizes that not everyone will accept this kind of blessing. Jesus recognizes that there will be dead ends. And in those cases, when the disciples are rejected, he directs them to wipe the dust off in protest, leave, and try again with the same intent in the next town. To keep their hearts open and receptive for the potential of blessing to grow in other ways. To never be hard of heart or closed off to the possibility of love to take root, even if it has to take root somewhere else.

The message is that we keep going. We don't give up on the love of Christ for one another. The difficult reality is that we can't open someone's heart for them but we can offer our own heart. At times, that has to be enough.

And this is where I think Jesus' teaching and Paul's teaching start to support each other so beautifully.

What Jesus is acknowledging is that not everyone will accept the goodwill of blessing. And in those cases, peace can't take root unless it has a place to take hold. No matter how hard you try, some hearts will continually be hardened by complacency, judgement, regret, anger, doubt or greed. You can't change those individuals or groups. That's between their heart and God.

But you can bless them and pray for them and hold a place of possibility in your heart for peace to take hold one day. Dusting off your feet doesn't mean that we give up hope. It means that we don't let their hardness of heart stop us from doing God's work, of sharing God's blessing with others. It means we can't let their resistance to our blessing damage our faith or keep us from sharing blessing with the next person and the next.

And if you are wondering how that might look in real time, Paul gives us some insight. In Galatians he describes very clearly our deliberate intention to be God's hands and heart in a challenging world. For Paul, our faith is to be carried out in loving kindness within community, always seeking to find a place for peace to take hold and for love to grow.

Here are some of the ways Paul describes this consistent act of blessing...

- Restore broken relationships in a spirit of gentleness.
- Bear one another's burdens.
- Ground yourself in the Spirit.
- Don't grow weary of doing what is right.
- Work for the good of all.

Now, Paul also acknowledges that we won't always get it right. At times, we will be the ones not accepting the blessing. But we are to come back to the basic intent of our faith time and time again, to not be afraid to cultivate peace, to strive for reconciliation and to offer to repair what is broken.

Peace and blessing are not silent. They are not indifferent. They are not complicit. They are active and courageous and willing to risk rejection.

Yes, you may have to dust your feet off at times, but keep going. Don't grow weary of trying to do what is right. Don't let your heart become hardened when your blessing isn't returned. Allow the love of Christ to fill you with reassurance and conviction that the simple act of blessing can move mountains when allowed to grow. And, for those we walk away from, we keep praying. We pray that their hearts will one day be opened. That their blessedness is received and peace may grow.

Blessed be God. And blessed be God's kingdom now and forever. Amen.