

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
May 21, 2017

Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Here am I! Send me!

Did any of you go to summer camp? Maybe as a pre-teen or a teenager? These sunny, long days have put me strongly in mind of sitting on the edge of a lake, chatting with my friends, getting the canoes ready for launch. I know that some people went to archery camp or horse camp or even scout camp. But for me and my family, it was always church camp.

Church camp typically had a theme. One year, I remember it was Blessed be the Ties that Bind, and we had to all wear old polyester thrift store ties for the whole week. Another year, it was something about being effective leaders, and we had to teach large groups of people how to play silly games like Toilet Tag or Capture the Flag. My favorite theme, though, was the year that the theme was Here am I! Send me! This is, of course, what Isaiah says to God when God calls on Isaiah to be a prophet to Israel. God says, Whom Shall I Send? And Isaiah says, "Here am I! Send me!" I don't remember much about that summer, but I do remember counselors popping out from trees, standing up in the mess hall, or even yelling into the shower rooms, "Whom Shall I Send!" and we were all supposed to respond, "Here am I! Send me!"

Sometimes the simple lessons are best. To this day, when I think about how Christianity works, I remember that voice saying, "Whom shall I send?" And I remember our excited responses, "Here am I! Send me!" A lot of these other stuff we talk about in church is just window dressing. The soul and center of the Christian life is being sent out into the world by Jesus to announce the reign of God. It might be as simple as helping someone one on one. It might be as big as organizing together to eradicate world hunger or poverty or famine. I don't know exactly where you are being sent. But I do know that the day will come when the voice says "Whom shall I send?" And you'll have a choice about how you'd like to answer.

As we talked about last week, the disciples are getting their marching orders from Jesus during these last days of his time on earth. They are figuring out what it means to be sent out on their own into the world in mission. Last Sunday, we talked about how the disciples were told to keep their eyes on God as they go out. God is the entirety of the map. This week, Jesus is telling them not to fear, because they will not be alone. In some special way, Jesus promises that his Spirit will be with them as they go out into the world to heal, to teach, to serve. Jesus comforts the disciples by saying that a spirit of truth will be upon them as they move in the world in the name of Jesus.

I think maybe we know something here about the spirit of truth. We know that the things in this life that are true aren't always the things the world says are true. The spirit of truth is humility. The spirit of truth is justice. The spirit of truth is service to our fellow disciples. The world sometimes offers a spirit of lies—lies about fulfillment, lies about reality. Most of those things

the world says we need are lies. The spirit of truth says we just need the bread, the wine, and the water.

I think the spirit of truth has accompanied us here at St. Mark's, just as Jesus promised. I see people who live a life of service to each other and to the community. We could always do more, of course, but I see deep commitment to the ministry of Jesus here on the corner of Hackett and Belleview. I have seen people serving the hungry at the Gathering. I've seen people writing their elected officials to work for social change in the world. I've seen thrift shop volunteers clothe the homeless and provide the dignity of a new shirt, a new pair of pants. I've seen the spirit of truth in this place.

I see truth in the Church School teachers that we're going to honor at the end of this liturgy. I see truth in the ministries of John and of Michelle, whose ordination anniversaries we're honoring today. I see truth in the way that this community is so generous in time, in money, in talent for the betterment of the world.

I see a group of people, lay and clergy, old and young, new members and decades-long members serving one another and serving the world. I see a group of people who said, "Here am I! Send me!"

Last week we learned to keep our eyes on God. This week we learn that we are not alone as we do this work...that we are accompanied by a spirit of truth from God.

The nature of our Christian life is to be sent. This is what the disciples are learning in these post-Easter gospel stories, and it's what we learn week after week in church. The end of the service isn't when we eat the bread. The end of the service is when the deacon sends us into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. And we go. We go with our eyes on God and accompanied by the spirit of truth that Christ promised to us.

Whom shall I send? Here am I! Send me. Go out into this world, filled with the spirit of God, to heal the sick, to give rest to the weary, to comfort the afflicted, and to make this world look a little bit more like the one Jesus imagines for us. We're Christians. We are disciples. We are the people who are sent out week after week to serve. Amen.