

**A sermon preached by Rev. Jason Cashing
at Clarence Presbyterian Church on Sunday, June 4, 2023**

Genesis 1:1-8, 26-31; Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-2

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Holy One, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

In the summer of 2002, early in the evening of an August day, I drove into the city of Austin, TX, to begin my formal ministry education by attending the Presbyterian Seminary located there. It had been a long journey of driving 12-15 hour days to get there from Montana, but I was finally arriving and getting my first experiences of city traffic. On a side note: if you ever plan to travel by car to an unfamiliar city, forego the excitement of “just get there” and plan out when you’ll arrive; I was not prepared for Austin rush hour to be my welcoming committee. But as I made my way to the campus, I was equal parts overjoyed and anxious. Overjoyed to have arrived, and to be starting such an amazing chapter of my life and ministry. Anxious at the unknown of something new and the unfamiliarity of what was ahead. It was an exciting day, to be certain, but there was a lot going on underneath all of that, as well.

Today is also an exciting day, not just for me but for all of us. We stand, together, on the threshold of a ministry that has great potential to be joyful, but which, if we’re honest, also carries with it a degree of anxiousness at the unknown and newness of it all. We carry with us who we have been and where, along with the memory of those who have led and guided us to this point. It’s exciting, and there’s a lot going on underneath it all, and that’s all ok. Because we are not the first ones to stand in the dynamic of such a position. That position was likely occupied by the disciples of Jesus, as well.

After all, they, too, have journeyed long days to reach their destination in the hills around Capernaum, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. In the immediate aftermath of Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial, they now find themselves about to meet him again in the resurrection. They have traveled many miles each day, each mile carrying with it more and more the reality of joyful expectation and anxious uncertainty. Joyful expectation because they know they are journeying to see Jesus again, and that they will be meeting him again in their home area, where it all began. How could such a homecoming, both physically and relationally, be anything but joyful expectation? But in all likelihood it was, and it probably isn’t hard for us to imagine that, too. Because they, too, were journeying toward something new and unknown, something unfamiliar. And even when the future is overwhelmingly good, it is still an unknown.

As they arrive to those familiar hills of their home area, as they begin to see Jesus in the near distance, Matthew’s gospel tells us that “they began to worship him.” Now, this is no everyday or habitual expression; this is a “filled with awe and wonder, overcome with joy” kind of worship. This is the kind of worship that fills them from their deepest hearts. It is joy personified. And at the same time, Matthew recounts, they also doubted. They weren’t quite sure what to expect, or what would happen next.

Again, I think I know how they felt. I think that, maybe today, you know, as well.

It might be hard to imagine ahead of time, though, just what would happen as the disciples arrived to be reunited with their Risen Lord. And perhaps the anxiety of the disciples finally overshadowed their hopeful expectation as Jesus, seemingly upon the instant of greeting them, gives them a new commission, “to go into the world, baptizing and making disciples.” It would be wondrously joyful, and also perhaps a little bit overwhelming. The whole world? Baptizing everyone? That’s a pretty tall order, and is dauntingly overwhelming.

I’m curious, do any of you happen to know which verb in Jesus’ Great Commission to the disciples, and other Christians, is actually the imperative verb? Over the centuries, many have taken it to be “baptize” and have made that their mandate - they feel they have not lived out Jesus’ command unless they have baptized any and every person that can get their hands on, literally. Others have applied the imperative tone to “make disciples” and consider their ministry ineffective and incomplete unless each and every person they have come across has eventually made a commitment to and profession of faith. Now, don’t get me wrong, I believe in baptizing and discipling, but neither of those verbs are the ones which are written in the imperative. No, the imperative verb in the Great Commission of Jesus is, simply, “go.”

“Go out into the world. Go out into this region. Go out into your home area and familiar places, bearing the good news of the gospel which I have passed on to you. And I will be with you until the end of the age. Go, and see what will come of your presence. Go.”

The commission is not to do any one specific act, but rather to go, to seek relationship and connection, and to recognize that anything else that might need to be realized will come naturally from that. It is to go, and live out the vision of the Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed and taught about, inviting people to live into on each and every occasion. And it was a vision that had begun from the first moments of recognizing God’s connection to the world.

When beginning to create, God, I believe, had a vision. A vision of all the elements and life that are chronicled in those verses of Genesis 1, but more than just a jumbled collection of disparate elements and animals and stars and heavens and birds and yes, even humans. A vision of connection. A vision of relationship. And in that, in the relationship, not only is creation good, but very good. In the going to one another, and bearing to one another that which makes life joyous and grants peace in the midst of uncertainty or anxiety...in that connection, creation is deemed to be “very good.”

Reflecting on the act of creation, Madeleine L’Engle writes, “God created, and it was joy: time, space, matter. There *is*, and we are part of that *is*-ness, part of that becoming. That is our calling: co-creation. Every single one of us, without exception, is called to co-create with God. No one is too unimportant to have a share in the making or unmaking

of the final showing-forth. Everything that we do either draws the Kingdom of love closer, or pushes it further off.”

Jesus commissions the disciples to “go.” Go forth, and co-create. Go, and bring people closer. Go, and live out the vision of the Kingdom of God. It’s what you are created to do, and they are again commissioned to do so.

After my first night in Austin, I did something which I had never really had to do before: I went exploring into a city that was more than a couple square miles wide. In the midst of an uncertainty and anxiety that had truly taken root over a future that was so unknown, I went out. You might even say that I listened to the Spirit say, “Go.” I began to learn the seminary, and the area, and the people. I found a church, which would become another welcoming community in all my time there. I built relationships, and not only sought to live the good news in relationship to others, but to receive their lives of proclamation, as well. And in this act, in this going, uncertainty and anxiety dissipated to be replaced fully by joy, hopeful expectation, and a peace that passes understanding. It was an exciting time.

And so, in this exciting day, we are once again offered the imperative of, “Go.” Go out into the community around us, reaching out to build connections. Go deeper into the communion of this congregation, continuing to co-create with God and each other, living out the vision of the Kingdom of God. Go. And let us go in joy. Amen.