

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: July 9, 2023

Leaving and Coming Home

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. We begin today's reading with a leaving and a coming home.

While I was in seminary, when my daughter was about 12 years old, I was offered a trip to El Salvador as part of my missionary internship which was required as field education. My sponsoring church was even willing to help me pay to have Connie, my daughter, go with me, as they thought the experience in diversity would be just the thing for a young lady.

I shared custody with my ex for ten years and at 9 years old Connie had learned to pack up and jump on a plane, follow the guides that were hired, and cross the country from New York state to California on a regular basis. So, I accepted the offer for both of us to go to El Salvador thinking it would be no problem, we were both seasoned travelers.

Well, for anybody who knows about parenting, sometimes what you think is really a good and exciting idea, is not really met with a lot of the same excitement by your tween. Connie, having arrived in California several days earlier, heard about the trip, in which we would be leaving on a plane again in several days, shrugged her shoulders and said, "Whatever."

"Whatever" does not describe the day of the trip. When it was time to leave for the airport, I can only think of Taylor Swift's song line, "screaming, crying, perfect storm, making all the tables turn". And I, for the life of me, could not figure out why. We were going on an adventure, when you're twelve, this is supposed to be fun!

Well, many years later Connie and I talk about that trip. It was wonderful in so many ways. Once we got on the plane, the rest was adventure, learning, and love. We both witnessed love and community and worship all in a strange place in a strange language. What had been the problem? The problem was we were scared of something new, especially when we had just gotten used to another new normal.

What actually happened? We got over our fears, got on the plane, met wonderful people, saw amazing stuff and began a much closer relationship. We had time in our strange environment to lean into each other and work things out. Like Rebekah in our Old Testament reading, we took the leap of faith, a leaving and a coming home.

For Rebekah, she will leave her home and become Isaac's wife. She leaves what she knows, but comes home to love. For even though this story seems to be one of an arranged marriage, there is love there, or so we are told. However, to get to that point, I am sure the couple needed to work a lot of things out.

In the very text itself you can feel that Rebekah is happy to not just offer a drink but to actually serve this strange man's animals as well. It was not

only offering what was needed, but going just one step beyond that showed her seeker this is the quality they needed in their family. Going one step beyond, Isn't that the true meaning of love?

This first reading begins the generations of Abraham's offspring, the beginnings of the people that Jesus would eventually call family, and the people Jesus would remind to leave what they know and follow him and come home.

Jesus is addressing his own people when he is asking about this generation. He knew that the people did not have the ears, minds or hearts to hear his offer of leaving old ways behind to accept the kingdom of heaven. To heed his words to love one another.

He even challenges them by explaining John, with all his purity of living did not live up to their standards, and he, who shared his life with all who came to him, was also not an acceptable way of being. He is calling them to the realization that nothing would ever please them due to their own intolerance (much like my tween) at least at the start.

Jesus is trying to explain to his own generation that their old ways of being, their guardedness to those in need, their avoidance of the others who were different from them, their constant judgment of each other and themselves created hardship and divisions instead of community and companionship. And this way of being needed to be left behind. If they were unwilling to forgive, to accept, and to move forward, they would miss the kingdom of God. That kingdom that they longed for in a future realm, a heavenly place

can, if one works at it, happen here on earth, even if only for brief periods of time.

In fact, Jesus is telling them that living in their old ways is a much harder burden than what he is offering them. Jesus calls all of us to leave our comfort zones, leave our settled-ness to experience the diversity, to love the unlovable, to be honest with ourselves and others.

When you feel loved by God, you are home no matter where you actually are. And you may be called by God to go that extra mile, "water the camels", so to speak, to ease another one's burden if it's possible. But this is what Jesus is calling us to do, bring in the Kingdom on earth, for just a moment.

If Jesus met you at the well, would you offer to tend his animals also? If Jesus calls you to a new beginning that leads to less judgment and more acceptance, will you try it? If Jesus calls you to let go and let God, can you?

Love can grow, even in the margins. My trip to El Salvador became an amazing one, one that allowed love to grow. And yes, it was hard to leave our comfort zone. Rebekah left her home and joined Isaac, a scary adventure, but we are told love would grow. And so, we must persevere knowing that Jesus calls us again and again to leave behind what is truly burdening us and follow his lead and allow love to grow. To leave and then to come home. Amen