

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: July 4, 2021

“What no longer serves you”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and Happy Independence Day. With independence on our minds today, let us look at our scriptures from a point of freedom. Let us ask the question “what do we need to let go of; what will allow us more independence?”

Today we have Jesus whose abilities are actually restricted due to people’s beliefs about who he is, as well as their disbelief in the ultimate power of God. I want you to take note here that Jesus cannot and does not heal anyone against their will. He does not argue with them, he does what he can and then leaves. As in the previous reading last week, we are reminded that healing takes a leap of faith, and we are reminded by our Epistle reading that sometimes illness and struggles are put there by God for us as a tool for soul growth.

But then we come to the story of the disciples who are asked to take nothing with them as they set out among the countryside to spread the good news of Jesus. Now I admit, this year my connection to their calling sounded in my mind a little different. But since 2020, everything is different.

Had Jesus been instructing us today would he have said please don’t take anything with you except hand sanitizer and a mask. Maybe he would have reminded them to dispose of their foot covering booties in a safe way so as not to spread any viruses or infections. And so we notice, with a bit of humor, we have survived this far through an ever-changing pandemic, but are still called to spread the good news.

However today, I would like to focus on the instructions “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet.”

Since we are not Jehovah witnesses and we are not going door to door to evangelize, I would like to expand this message of shaking off the dust to something very similar, and even maybe the truer meaning to this scripture for us today.

For those of us in spiritual practice, we may not use the words “shake off the dust” but we do use phrases like “the things that no longer serve you.” For our scripture today, Jesus is telling us that if people do not except you the way you are, it really is OK to leave the situation, possibly break relationships with those people, and to set your self free from worrying about the situation. The problem of non- acceptance is theirs, not yours.

I think this is an important message right now as the world continues to change and there are a lot of “balls in the air” politically speaking. For some of us our relatives and friends may not share our views on politics, our lifestyles, climate change, the pandemic and many other subjects, the question here then comes up, is it OK to walk away?

Jesus tells us that if the message of good news, Jesus’ message of acceptance, repentance and forgiveness for all is not acceptable to those who you are with, don’t worry, don’t argue, just walk away.

This may not only apply to the people we know but also to those things in our lives that no longer serve us. You may have noticed over the last year that your tolerance for the intolerant has become a little shorter, or maybe that those old ways of being you were taught growing up are not helping you move into a new future, a future filled with acceptance of various cultures, religions, scientific discovery and the like.

This is especially true as the church in and of itself admits to committing errors involving humanity. For example: the burial of children from church schools in unmarked graves, or the prejudice throughout history resulting in exclusion of people of color, women, and those with uncommon lifestyles from positions of church leadership. Even those people in the Old Testament reading were moving forward after admitting their wrongs.

Yes it is true, we are living and learning, we are expanding what it means to be church and what it means to “respect the dignity of every human being” as our baptismal vows proclaim. But, as we learn, we must admit there are old ways of being and even possibly people we know in our lives that no longer fit our new ideas and our new acceptance.

Now I am not suggesting that you break up with a good friend, or that you estrange yourself from relatives, but I am wondering if you need to struggle being uncomfortable. It may be enough to model grace and let God and the Holy Spirit take care of the rest. You can not make someone have faith. In fact, you can not change someone who is not ready and willing to try to change.

Jesus did not rebuke those from his town, he was amazed at their lack of acceptance and faith. This lack of faith left those people without healing, but Jesus did nothing to interfere, he just moved on.

Whether we are talking about quitting smoking, or removing bad things from our diet because it no longer serves us, or if we are using too much social media, or engaging in an argument with someone who has different beliefs, we need to know it is alright to move on. Let the cigarettes go to someone else, allow another person to purchase that sugary desert you know you shouldn't have, remember arguing over social media is pointless – and don't judge others for it – but move on.

Sometimes moving on can be the most difficult thing to do, and sometimes it is also the most loving. For those of us who have clothes in our closet we will never wear again, or expired food in our pantry that we know we will never really eat – and just in case you were saving it for the apocalypse – 2020 came and went, that ship has sailed, move on.

For those people you have tried to inform, love and forgive – but they are not having it, it is OK to move on. Jesus doesn't tell us God is done with them, Jesus doesn't say the Holy Spirit is not continuing to work in their lives, Jesus is simply stating “you did your best, move on.”

The world is changing; the church is changing; you are changing; it is going to be alright. We are not the early church, nor are we the church of our parents and that is OK. In fact, we are not the same people we were before the pandemic, and that is alright too.

Relationships change, obviously Jesus' relationship with his family changed. Even the relationship with the disciples changed as they were given gifts and the charge to continue Jesus' ministry. Change is good if you let it be.

I challenge you this summer to see what no longer serves you in your life, and then let it go. Don't worry, don't fret, don't try to convince yourself you are the same when you are not. Clean the closet or the pantry, connect with those who hear you, and disconnect from those who are not ready to hear you yet – another opportunity may come as the Spirit never stops working. But please, this is important to hear - do not feel responsible for the world. I would love to tell you to shake the dust off your feet – but maybe you just need to take off the shoe cover booties and sanitize. Have a true Independence Day and experience the freedom of knowing God's got your back, and if you need to move on, so be it. **Amen.**