

July 7, 2024  
Lectionary 14, Year B  
The 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Mark 6:1-13  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

### Do Not Overpack

As you might know, a week from tomorrow, Rebecca Sol, six high school students from Emmanuel, and I will be heading for the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans for six days of worship, serving, learning, and adventures.

Since the beginning of June, we've been meeting twice a week to prepare for the trip. We've been working through preparation materials that came from the Gathering organizers. We've talked about the themes for each day of the Gathering. The overall theme of the Gathering, is "Created to Be", and the Gathering scripture verse is Psalm 139:14, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, that I know very well." The themes for each day of the Gathering are:

- Created to be brave.
- Created to be authentic.
- Created to be free.
- Created to be disruptive.
- Created to be disciples.

In addition to working our way through the getting ready curriculum, we've also been we've been walking together, with open ended questions as a way of getting to know each other better before we travel and as a way of getting ready for all of the walking that we'll do at the Gathering. The added benefit, for me, it that it's helping me get miles for Calumet's "Boom Chicka Move" program.

We've also been working on logistics for the Gathering. Where are we staying? What swag are we taking to give away to the other people at the Gathering? How

are we going to stay safe and healthy at the Gathering? We're working on creating a covenant with each other for the trip, that states what we're going to commit to doing to help us be good guests in New Orleans and to help us take care of ourselves and each other while we travel.

We've also created a packing list for the trip. The Gathering organizers sent out a sample packing list for us to share with our group, but we felt like it missed some things, so we had to develop our own list with more specifics for our group. We'll be wearing matching t-shirts for a lot of the Gathering, so those needed to be on the list. We'll need comfortable shoes to wear. We'll need toiletries. We'll need shorts or cool pants. We'll need sunglasses. Our hotel has a pool so we'll need swimsuits. We'll need pajamas. We'll need snacks. We'll need phones and phone chargers, so that we can stay connected with each other and with the folks at home. We'll need sunscreen. Our packing list is a full double space page long, and we can only take a carry-on size suit case and a backpack, so at the bottom of the page I wrote, perhaps ironically, although I didn't really mean it ironically, "Do not overpack."

I feel like Jesus could teach us a thing or two about not overpacking. Because Jesus' packing list for his disciples is this:

- 1 pair of sandals
- 1 staff
- 1 tunic

His instructions to his disciples when he was sending them out on their very first mission trip, could be summed up in three words. "Do not overpack."

Sometimes the Bible can be funny. But sometimes the Bible gets treated as so holy that we miss that. We fail to see the funny because we've been taught to treat the Bible as sacred, as important, even as mysterious, rather than as something to laugh with. (Notice I said laugh with, not laugh at.) The Bible certainly isn't a joke

book, but there are parts of it that are funny and I feel like we run into one of those funny parts today.

Listen again to the beginning of our gospel reading for today:

[Jesus] came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? (Mark 6:1-3)

So, what’s happening here? A local boy, a son of the congregation, comes home. He has been out making a reputation for himself in the world. People know his name. He’s only been gone for a little while, a year, maybe a little more, but he’s already becoming a famous rabbi, a famous teacher, a famous healer. And he comes home to preach, to teach. Did you hear what the people said about him? How they marveled at his wisdom? How they talked about the deeds of power he had done? How they were astounded when they heard him, heard his words? How they knew his mother and his brothers and his sisters?

Wouldn’t you think it would be time for the ticker tape parade down the main street of Nazareth? It’s hometown hero time.

You see, as I was reading the words of Jesus’ home congregation, I was not expecting what came next. Because after talking about his wisdom, after talking about his deeds of power, after talking about his lowly origins, a carpenter from their own town, the next thing the text tells us is that, “they took offense at him.” (Mark 6:3)

What? To me, that’s funny. It did not feel like where the story was going.

Was it because of his lowly origins that they took offense at him? Who did he think he was, this carpenter, this ordinary kid (even though he was more than 30 years old), whose family they met at the marketplace and went to synagogue with. Maybe they thought that he didn't have the credentials to be teaching. Maybe they thought that he didn't have the family background to justify him becoming famous. Maybe they thought that they could never put their trust into someone they had watched grow up, who had made them their furniture, who had been just another member of their community not all that long ago.

Jesus' response to them was to say, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." (Mark 6:4) And his time with them was short. He laid hands on a few of their sick people and cured them, but he didn't stay long in his hometown, where their unbelief was so amazing, even to him.

I've said before that all of the gospels, but especially the gospel of Mark, paint the disciples in an unflattering light. They're often misunderstanding Jesus, missing the point of his teachings, his mission. They're asking foolish questions, making foolish requests, and doing what seems to be the exact opposite of what Jesus wants them to do.

But in today's gospel reading, in contrast to Jesus' hometown crowd, the people who had known him from childhood, the disciples come off looking like shining stars of faith, shining stars of trust in Jesus, of obedience, of bravery. Because Jesus sent them out, two by two, to proclaim repentance, for the kingdom of God has come near, to cast out unclean spirits, and to heal the sick. He sent them out with no provisions. They were to bring no bread, no bag, no money, in other words, no snacks. He sent them out with hardly any clothes, no matching t-shirts, just the clothes on their back and one pair of sandals. And each other.

Here's the amazing thing, if you know anything about the disciples. It's that they went. They went on this challenging mission, that they probably felt very

unprepared for. They went without arguing or questioning or doubting. Even that, in the context of the gospel of Mark, is kind of funny.

But their trust in Jesus, paid off. Because through their faith in Jesus' power in them, they were able to do amazing things. They were able to transform people's lives. They set people free from evil, they set people free from disease. In their ministry they saw people set free from whatever bound them, from unclean spirits, from sin, from disease. They trusted in Jesus and through that trust, they saw, with their own eyes, and through power that flowed from their own hands, the kingdom of God drawn near.

This sermon might have been a better sermon for me to preach next week. Next Sunday will be our last Sunday before the Gathering. We'll be leaving for New Orleans early, early the next morning. Next Sunday at the end of worship you'll be commissioning us for our trip to the Gathering, you'll be speaking words of blessing over us for our trip. Next Sunday will be our launching worship service. So, it might have made more sense for me to be preaching about the Gathering next Sunday. But still this Sunday, because of our gospel reading for today, Jesus and I have packing on the brain. But more than that, more importantly than that, we have trusting on the brain.

In his hometown community, where no one believed or trusted in Jesus, it seems that that lack of faith stifled Jesus' power. People who did not want to see the kingdom of God drawn near in Jesus, did not get to see it. In contrast, when people trusted in Jesus, when his disciples trusted in Jesus and Jesus sent them out with their tiny little packing list, his disciples were able to do amazing things, things that transformed the lives of the people that they touched and things that transformed them. The disciples trusted in Jesus and changed the world.

I'll be honest, some of the kids who are going to the National Youth Gathering have had their worries and their doubts about the trip. I'll be really honest. Even I have had my worries and doubts about the trip. We're heading out

into the great unknown. And even though I have been to two other Gatherings before, I've never been to a Gathering in New Orleans before. It will be different from anything I've ever experienced and the kids don't even have the benefit of having been to a Gathering before. So, it will be really different from anything that they've ever experienced.

Some of the kids who are going on the trip know each other really well; have known each other for years. Others who are going have only met this year and have been going through a crash course of getting to know each other. Some of the kids who are going are experienced travelers. Others are not. Some of the kids who are going are really familiar with and comfortable with church stuff. Others are not, and for both groups the Gathering will be a challenge. We'll have more clothes and luggage than the disciples have when we go on this journey, but what's more important than what's in our luggage is what's in our hearts.

Will we have trust that we have been created to be Jesus' people in the world, to share the good news of the kingdom of God drawn near?

Will we have trust to hear that we are created to be ourselves, beloved children of God, sent to serve and love the world?

Will we have trust to look around us, at those who are traveling with us, and see them as the companions God has given us for the journey, our co-workers in the gospel, with their own gifts, their own talents, their own skills, their own challenges, for the mission we have been given together, and will we have grace to receive their gifts and help them with their challenges?

Those questions are not just questions for disciples being sent on a mission with nothing but trust in Jesus' words and Jesus' power. Those questions are not just for the six kids and a couple of adults from our congregation and the 15,000 kids and adults from around the country and the world who are going to the National Youth Gathering this year.

Those questions are for all of us, who take no offense at Jesus, to whom Jesus has given power and a mission and a calling to bring good news to a world in pain; good news that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. We too are called to trust, to believe that Jesus can do great things through us. We too are called not to overpack. Amen.