

July 21, 2024
Lectionary 16, Year B
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
The Baptism of Zayn Ellison Morris
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Every Day and Everywhere

How nervous the disciples must have been. Jesus had sent them out with next to nothing, the sandals on their feet, a staff, the tunics they were wearing, and the promise that they would have the same power that he did over unclean spirits, those spiritual powers that stand between humanity and the fullness of life.

Last Monday, 6 kids, Rebecca Sol, some parents and spouses, and I woke up around 3:30 in the morning, to start our journey to the National Youth Gathering. How nervous I was. How nervous all of us must have been. I have been to a National Youth Gathering before, but I was still nervous about the logistics, being on time, getting onto the plane, getting from the airport to the hotel, figuring out where we would eat, finding our way around the city. Imagine how much more nervous Rebecca and the kids must have been, since they had never been to a National Youth Gathering before. Yes, we had more in our backpacks and carry-on suitcases than the disciples were allowed, but still it was hard to know what to expect, especially hard for them. They were leaving everything they were familiar with, family, friends, pets, home, climate, food, for a great unknown. And while we all knew each other going into the trip, there's a big difference from spending a few hours at church with each other once or twice a week, to living with each other and spending every waking hour with each other for six days.

It was a lot.

In today's gospel reading, we hear about the disciples' return to Jesus, that they gathered around him and told him about what they had done, about the demons they had cast out, the sick people they had healed, and the things that they

had taught, how they had told people to repent, for the kingdom of God had drawn near.

It doesn't tell us about their demeanor when they were giving their reports, but I can imagine that they were excited, that they were interrupting each other, words running into each other as they told Jesus their stories. They must have thought that Jesus was crazy when he sent them out with so little, but their needs were attended to as they brought life in Jesus' name. They were fed, they were clothed, they were giving lodging, and relationships were built as they ministered and proclaimed a new kingdom, built on the gift of healing and hope.

I can also imagine how tired they must have been. Here's why.

We were up early yesterday morning. We had to be in the lobby with our luggage at 8:00 a.m. so that we could check out of our hotel and catch a streetcar over to our final worship service at the Gathering, which lasted over two hours. But the streetcars didn't take us the whole way to the venue where worship was being held, so we had to walk about a fourth of a mile after we got off the streetcar, with a crowd of other Lutheran youth and adults. After the worship service, we walked back to the streetcar. We couldn't get on the first one that came because it was too full so we figured out a different one we could take, got on that one when it arrived, and traveled to the stop that got us closest to the place where we were having lunch. Then we walked two tenths of a mile to lunch. By the way, if you're ever in New Orleans, be sure to try Zesty Creole. It was great! Tell them the Lutheran youth sent you.

Then we went back to our hotel, which was pretty close by, to get our luggage. We took Lyfts to the airport. We waited in a security line with hundreds of other Lutheran youth and adults and some very perplexed other travelers, wondering what they had wandered into. We made it through security, with only a couple of mishaps that I won't get into now, but they're good stories for another time.

We made it onto our first flight, from New Orleans to Washington DC. We landed in DC at 8:30 p.m. but didn't get off the plane until 8:50, which really stressed me out, because I thought our connecting flight was at 9:30. People, mostly other Lutheran travelers, let us cut them in the disembarking line, so that we could make our connection. We raced across the airport, got to the gate, discovered that I had misread the boarding passes, and our flight was actually at 10:00. Still, we didn't have tons of time to hang around before we got on our second plane, which landed in Boston at 11:15. We were back in Norwood at 12:20 a.m.

I know, and the others who were on the trip with me, know a thing or two about tired.

The disciples must have been thrilled when Jesus said what he said next, after their stories were over, after they'd talked themselves out. Jesus said, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6:31a) They were going to get a rest. They were going to get a break.

When we were in New Orleans, according to Julia, who kept track of our miles, we walked between four and seven miles every day. And by the way, this weather that we're having is balmy compared to New Orleans, when to walk outside was to sweat through your clothes. It felt like pushing through heavy wet curtains to walk through the streets of New Orleans. And the days were long. And the days were full. And it was very amusing to me to hear teenagers asking, "Can we have a break? Can we have a nap? When can we go to bed?"

"For many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat." (Mark 6:31b) So, it was said of the disciples.

And it was true of the National Youth Gathering attendees too. There were times when it was hard to fit in time to eat for all of our coming and going with our 16,000 other Lutheran youth and adults. Rebecca and I tried to schedule some breaks for the kids, and to make sure that they got regular meals at somewhat

regular times, but sometimes they just had to rely on the snacks that they had brought.

Jesus tried to get his disciples a break. They went away in a boat, to a deserted place by themselves. But the crowd figured out where they were going and went there on foot to catch up with them. to meet them there. And their work was not done. Jesus saw the crowd and had compassion on them, so, instead of resting in a quiet place by themselves, Jesus taught the crowds, and the disciples were right there by his side.

Like Jesus, listening to his disciples tell him about their adventures in his name, you will have a chance in August to hear the youth who went to New Orleans tell you about their experiences at the National Youth Gathering.

Because in spite of all of the walking, in spite of the crowds, and let me tell you, we rode on some crazy crowded streetcars and walked in some crowds that could be described as a mass of t-shirt clad teenage humanity, it was an amazing time. We have so much more to tell you about then how hot it was, how much we walked, how tired we got, how intense it could be, how many fruit snacks, granola bars, and goldfish we ate.

We have stories to tell about meeting Jesus and being with Jesus and serving as Jesus called us to serve.

Today is the baptism day of Zayn Ellison Morris. Today Zayn will be welcomed into the community of faith and named and claimed as a child of God, as a disciple of Jesus. As Zayn grows, I hope he will learn, from his family, from his Godparents, and from the church, from this church, that Jesus loves him, always and forever, and that following and serving Jesus is an everyday and everywhere thing.

Following Jesus is not just something we do for a couple of hours when we get together for worship on Sunday. Following Jesus is not just something we do on holidays or when we say a prayer before a meal. Following Jesus is something

we do everyday and everywhere we go. Because everywhere we go, in our schools and in our workplaces and with our friends and when we're just out and about at playgrounds and parks, on beaches or at the mall, or getting gas or going grocery shopping, everywhere we go there are people who are hurting, people who need hope, people who need healing, people who need love, people who need to experience in word and in action, the good news that the kingdom of God has drawn near. And we are called to bring it, even when we're tired, and if we're not able to go out much, then we're called to bring it by our faithful prayers for our world.

We come to worship, we gather in community to be reminded of that good news ourselves, to be reminded that Jesus loves us and the whole world, and to get fueled up for the work that we are called to do in Jesus' name.

You know where you can also get that reminder, of Jesus' love, and get fueled up for that work? At the National Youth Gathering. And in twelve years, which will be 2036(!), when he is old enough, maybe Zayn will go to the National Youth Gathering too. But in the meantime, we'll all have to tell him, and when he's just a little older, he can also remind us, that Jesus loves us and that we are called to follow, called to serve, every day and everywhere. Amen.