

**Sermon for Proper 9C – July 7, 2019**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

***Going Out Two By Two: The KIN-Dom of God has come near!***

These last weeks of being in the pulpit among you have been such a glorious reminder for me, of what I truly believe “preaching” is. First, good preaching is an art form. It is creative, artistic, inspired, and in all ways, it is dialogical. To be a preacher heard in one’s own congregation means that the preacher must, first, last and always, listen. You listen to the stories of the people you love. You listen to what seems to be on their hearts. You listen for what is not said. You listen. And then, you pray.

Only then do you begin the sermon process – the praying with the scriptures (my practice is *lectio divina*...) reading out loud in the quiet of my home, in the office here, when no one else is around, in the courtyard here on a bench, accompanied by the songs of God’s natural world all around. I read them aloud, over and over again.

And then, I listen again. I listen as these scriptures enter into dialogue in my heart where the scriptures encounter your stories. Your aches, your pains, your fears, your hopes, your dreams, your grief, your celebrations... your stories, your lives.

And then I pray... *“Holy One, help me to rid myself of all distractions. Help me to hear what it is that You alone place on my heart as I listen and pray with these sacred texts of Scripture and the sacred texts of the lives of those I love.”*

Only then, do I read, or study... only then do I dare put one single word on a page and call it the beginning of a sermon. Only then, when my heart is full and the Spirit does her work within me, do I dare put pen, or keyboard to work.

I think it’s important you know the process by which a priest preaches and the deeper spirituality at work within the sacred privilege of stepping into a pulpit or walking among you as we dialogue about biblical texts.

Last Saturday, the profile workshop, as I mentioned, was an very amazing day for this community as we began to tell our stories. Stories of what Church of Reconciliation has meant from the very beginning; stories of what Church Reconciliation means now, and hopes and dreams for what Church of Reconciliation might become as we discern God’s dream for us.

As I listened deeply, I also heard disappointment and desire... familiar themes for priests to hear if we dare admit it. I listened to the beginning musings on what you might hope to find in a new Rector... based on all that has gone before and lessons learned.

Disappointment and desire always stand in tension, don’t they? How have these feelings appeared in your life? In your most cherished relationships? In those places of small and big deaths – endings of relationships you never expected? And what have you learned from all that has been? How has desire and disappointment shown up here at Reconciliation? And what have they taught you?

You know, we priests ask the same thing of ourselves. And when we don’t, we soon get into trouble. Trouble that may find its way as isolation. Trouble that may find its way as a workaholic. Trouble that begins to erode one’s most essential connection to the voice of the Divine who called us into this vocation in the first place.

We lose perspective. We lose the self-awareness that keeps us honest. And we lose connections with the very people, the Divine has given us to love and serve, to invite into deeper relationship with the dance of Love that is our faith in the Trinity, the faith we profess in Jesus Christ. We even lose the capacity to ask for and receive forgiveness and when that happens, suspicion and distrust are soon to follow.

The art of *preaching as dialogue* as I believe it is, can only happen, if you allow me to know you, and I allow you to know me. Now, that can be also be dangerous as there are reasons to hold some very sacred boundaries that ground our relationships in health and “wholiness”.

And the invitation to know, really know one another comes also with some risk, doesn't it? The risk of owning our own gifts as well as our limits, not as some litmus test for evaluation but as a way of being invited to deeper relationship that bears the marks and even the scars of truly authentic relationship.

Just this week, I read a sermon that at first, I didn't even wish to complete reading. The preacher, whom I have never met, started out by saying how unfair expectations and agendas are of parishes for priests, especially new rectors. And I thought, well, that won't be the case for Reconciliation! And then I recalled the list of gifts, charisms, hopes and dreams that were layered on the newsprint we plastered all over Brown Hall. And I thought... well, there is always that possibility.

It's really why I trust the process before us. As I said before, the choice of your/our new Rector is not ours, not really. It primarily rests with the Holy Spirit. And She has quite a lead on that, be assured. The work of generous hearts and spirits of the Search Committee and then the Vestry is to pray and discern the way to invite God's dream to unfold, in a new and holy relationship with the call to our new Rector. The Holy Spirit is at work and God's got this.

St. Luke tells of Jesus sending out over 70 disciples to surrounding villages. Biblical scholars who write books about St. Luke's gospel often note that Luke alone mentions this story. Some think the number 70 refers to the non-Jewish nations, the “gentiles” evangelized by Paul and Peter, and company. We read about their endeavors in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's second volume of reflections on Jesus and the first Christians. *Which we study as a whole parish beginning in September!* Other scholars cite that Moses called 70 elders to assist him in his task of shepherding Israel as it moved through the exodus to the promised land. Perhaps the use of the number seventy can both be true.

If we look more closely at the text, we note that Jesus sends these disciples out in pairs. Two by two to every town and place he intended to go. They were his ambassadors, his recon team, his evangelists preparing the way. And in Jesus' instructions he spares them nothing as he describes the down right dangerous conditions, risks, and deadly possibilities awaiting these first discipleship pairs. Traveling lightly, accepting the hospitality of strangers and when rejected, no retribution, the simple returning of the peace upon them. This is to be their rhythm of life.

I like to hear Jesus saying to his disciples: “Wherever you go, proclaim, “The Kin-dom of God has come near.” The K-I-N- dom building work of Jesus, the Way of Love, the way of reconciliation and restoration that are at the heart of our faith, and the foundation of God's mission for the Church.

It's also important to understand that those who are commissioned by Jesus are the *baptized people of God*. They are not clergy. *They are you...* the holy people of God whose very lives as disciples of Jesus Christ are to be spent declaring the Kin-dom of God everywhere you go. Such a strong foundation of faith is what we are called to practice, practice, and practice as the Body of Christ, the Church.

Are we who are called to be your spiritual companions, as clergy, called to share a unique and special responsibility for the carrying out of the mission of God? Of course! Yet we do so most faithfully when

we support you in discerning gifts of ministry with you, when we anoint, pray, and consecrate with you our lives and the sacraments as “outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual truth.” When we go together into neighborhoods and march out of our comfort zones and proclaim, “The KIN-dom of God has come near!”

We do that ministry together as the Baptized Body of Christ, each with our own gifts, limitations, disappointments, desires and dreams. As in this Gospel, we do this most faithfully in the spirit of “two by two.”

Jesus, present among us this morning, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, continues to call us, send us, and empower us. We all have a vocation to ministry. Perhaps this week, in our quiet times, when we have holy silence enfolding us, we might listen, too. Listen with our hearts to the ever inviting voice of Jesus saying, “Hey friends, go out two by two, proclaim the KIN-dom of God... beware of the forces against you... have fun, bless, heal, reconcile, and live in the fullness of my Love. I can’t wait to hear our youth’s stories of just such KIN-dom building from their mission trip to Houston. Until then... let’s be about the work we have been given to do, **together!**”

Amen.