

Moving On  
February 3, 2013  
Luke 4:42-44

*At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.*

I received an e-mail the other day from my friend Amy. Amy is a pastor in Oklahoma City and we graduated from Vanderbilt together. She is also part of my clergy women group that has traveled together these past few years. I adore her as a friend and respect her as a pastor so when she called me last year to ask me if I would go through a Doctor of Ministry program together I jumped at the chance. So far we have had two classes. Amy and I room together, eat supper together, study together, and commiserate about homework together.

So I get this e-mail from Amy and I can tell from the first sentence I am not going to like it. If it is possible to communicate dread in an e-mail I received it full force as I began to read. "I really hate to tell you this," she begins. "I'm thinking about..." she continues. Long story short, her husband partially retired this fall and she is starting to think about traveling and spending more time with him. If she spends four weeks a year at school she doesn't feel like she can take any extra time off. Imagine! She wants to spend time with her husband instead of me. You can probably guess where this is going – she wants to drop out of the DMin program that she talked me into. "I hate to disappoint you," she concluded. "I haven't decided yet...let me know your thoughts."

The fear of disappointing others is a powerful force in our lives...and it leads people to do all kinds of stuff they really don't want to do or shouldn't do. There is a scene in the movie "Sleepwalk With Me" where a couple that has been together eight years finally gets honest with each other before their wedding. One finally confesses, "I don't want to marry you." He fully expects his fiancé to burst into tears, get angry, maybe even throw things at him but instead she looks at him and says with relief, "I don't want to marry you." She asks him, "Why did you ask me?" to which he replied, "I didn't want to disappoint you."

I can remember being at a retreat once, years ago, with a group of clergy women. In a moment of honesty an older woman said, "I never should have had kids." Anticipating our disapproval she continued on, "Don't get me wrong, I love my kids, I do. I just never saw myself as a mom." Finally, someone asked the obvious question, "Why did you have kids?" "Because it was what you did...you got married and had kids." She didn't want to face the disapproval of friends and family for going off and doing her own thing.

My son-in-law is the first person in his family to ever move away from Iowa and from family. Even though it has been years since he left, family members still share their disapproval and disappointment with all kinds of sarcastic comments and digs. Instead of being proud of what he has accomplished they resent that he ever left. He had to drive fast and hard to break out of that force field of neediness and expectation.

That same force field of need and expectation surrounded Jesus. He was trying to leave Capernaum after healing and teaching and casting out demons. He got up early and went out to a deserted place so he could be on his way, but they found him. “We need you, Jesus!” “My son is dying, Jesus!” “Don’t go, Jesus!” “My daughter is sick, Jesus!” “There are still so many, Jesus!” “Stay here with us, Jesus!” They wanted to prevent him from leaving them, Luke tells us. I know I would be standing in that crowd if I had a sick kid or couldn’t work. I might even get angry and feel betrayed as he walks away without finishing the job at Capernaum. How dare he say no! But he did.

Nancy Regan launched her “Just Say No” campaign in 1982. If someone asks you to do drugs, just say no.” Just say no. Thirty years later it turns out that we are not so good at saying no – to drugs – to violence – to deceit – to greed. We’re also not so good at saying no to those things we don’t want to do but do because we don’t want to disappoint someone.

If you do learn how to say no, be prepared to meet resistance. If you are fortunate the person you say no to will say, “I understand – we all have to make choices.” But more often than not what we get is negotiating, pouting, anger, and guilt trips. If you hold your ground and don’t cave into the pressure you will be told, in one way or another, that you are a disappointment.

As the crowd walked back to their homes and Jesus walked in the other direction what do you suppose those folks were thinking about Jesus?

So what gave Jesus the strength to walk away? He knew what he was sent to do. He wasn’t sent to settle down and set up shop, he was sent to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to other places. It was his passion. It was his calling. It is what he was born to do. And even if it meant disappointing people he stayed true to his calling.

What does this mean for those of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus?

Look at the disciples. They left everything to follow Jesus – and they also left a wake of disappointment. They abandoned jobs, employees, friends, even family to follow Jesus.

Maybe for us it’s not so dramatic. Perhaps it is more like the couple that leaves the church of their parents under the threat of hell, fire and brimstone – to become part of a church that loves and welcomes all and seeks to change the world. “No – we will not be part of a church that threatens and condemns.”

Perhaps it is more like the guy who is out with his friends and stops the conversation when it becomes degrading to women or demeaning of immigrants. “What’s your problem – we’re just having fun,” his friends say. “No – I will not participate in the dishonoring of another human being.”

Perhaps it is more like the woman who hears her neighbor screaming at and hitting her kids. “No – I will not stand idly by and allow the abuse of a child.”

Perhaps it is more like the youth, out with all his friends, when they decide to decide to vandalize a teacher's house. "No – I would rather walk home friendless than destroy someone else's property."

It's a whole lot easier to just say no when you know who you are and what you are called to do.

It is important that we know who we are and what we are called to do. We are disciples – with a little "d" and a big "D." We are first and foremost followers of Jesus. We are called to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and with all our strength. AND we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That means doing the loving thing and treating others the way we want to be treated.

Where Jesus leads us – we will follow. We will follow him into broken lives and filthy places because that is where he leads us. We will be light to those in darkness – hope to the hopeless – and love to the loveless. We will be instruments of peace and we will welcome every person Christ has invited to the table that we share every Sunday.

We will be Christ in the world and to anything that dares to sidetrack us from this calling we will say no! We WILL disappoint. Not everyone will approve. And that is okay.

As for my friend Amy, I told her she needs to do what she needs to do and that I am a big girl and will be fine. Sure, I'm disappointed, but that is life. Perhaps the best we can do for each other is offer blessings for the journey.

Amen.