Sermon for Sunday, June 11, the Second Sunday After Pentecost

In our readings this morning, the operative word is "Go!" Abram is told by God to leave home and go to someplace not defined for him, and he goes. The tax-collector Matthew, a person who would be shunned by many of the Jews because he was an agent of the Roman empire, is told by Jesus to go with him…and he goes. Jesus instructs the Pharisees, who are scandalized by the presence of sinners at his dinner table, to "Go and learn what it means for God to desire mercy, not sacrifice."

And then one of the religious leaders asks Jesus' help for his sick daughter. A woman who has been chronically ill for years goes to him and touches his robe in hope that the mere touch of the cloak will cure her. In each case that word "Go" is present: the child, seemingly dead, surrounded by mourners, awaits Jesus, who says "Go away, you mourners, she is not dead." And she is, indeed, well. The woman cured of her illness is told, in essence, "Go, for your faith has made you well."

I've said to you before that being a follower of Jesus Christ is not a passive thing: it is active. Jesus is the model of this. This is a man who goes, walking all over the Galilee and down to Jerusalem, taking a boat across to the western side of the Galilee. People go to see him, to hear him, to be baptized by him or cured by him. The disciples go, dropping everything, when Jesus invites them into the work.

I'm struck, though, by the fact that nothing happens until Jesus goes first. He invites us into active relationship, with him and with each other. Jesus goes. In fact, he goes after Matthew, seeking him out, inviting him to follow him. Jesus chooses Matthew. Jesus chooses the other disciples. Jesus chooses relationship.

And when Jesus calls these disciples, he doesn't say "think about it." He doesn't negotiate terms. It's a yes or no kind of thing. They either go or they don't go. You'll recall that Jesus invites a person elsewhere in the gospels and the person says, "I've got to settle a few things at home" and Jesus responds with something that sounds a little like Yoda saying "Do or do not. There is no try."

The struggle with this choosing, this call to go, is that so much gets in our way. Are we capable? Are we misunderstanding this? What happens if we fail? Are we too old, too ill, too introverted, too fallible, too …whatever? And yet, Jesus chooses us.

I know those fears well.

When I first wrestled with whether or not I was called to ordained ministry, for a long time I couldn't even say the words aloud. They were terrifying. I felt so unworthy. And then, the first few times I said them, I burst into tears. Who would want me to do this work? And yet, once I settled into the path toward ministry, a beautiful calm came over me.

He chooses us to be in relationship with him. He chooses us to go, each in our own fashion. And if we are so chosen, we will be able to do what he asks of us, even if we doubt that we can. The Princeton scholar of preaching Cleophas LaRue puts it well: “It is not so much what Jesus sees in us that makes us worthy, but rather what he puts in us when we obey his command.”

So go, brothers and sisters in Christ. Go and do what Jesus has put on your heart. Go make lunches at the Hope Center. Go engage in conversation with someone who is very different from you, and listen more than you talk. Go and help youngsters to improve their reading. Go and help a neighbor who cannot go to the store. Go and pray with someone who is hurting. Go. Because Jesus went first, and then he chose you to go, too. You were given the gift of faith. What you will need will be given to you, so you can go and do.

Christ was all about going, and he showed us how. Where will we go, and what will we do? If we listen for that whisper of the Holy Spirit, we will know, and it will be good.

Blessings on all of us on the road to “GO!”

Amen.