

Sermon for Sunday, June 18, 2023

Jesus knew that he would not be on this earth forever, so his work, as we hear in this gospel passage, was to prepare his disciples, who were with him through most all of his ministry, to carry it on. And so he decided to give them a chance to try it.

We can imagine how frightening that must have been! They knew that they weren't Jesus. They saw how he was now being mobbed everywhere they went, people asking for healing, for the casting out of demons, even just asking for a word of hope. What would happen if they tried to do this and failed? Would they be slain by the mob? Would the religious leaders call them heretics and drive them out?

It was a high-risk thing, and Jesus could see in their faces their reservations about doing this. But Jesus also knew that it was important that they start getting comfortable with this work that would be their calling once Jesus was no longer with them.

So he structured this experiment carefully, giving them clear instructions as well as encouraging words. It was akin to riding a bicycle: you started with some training wheels on. At first, perhaps dad or mom held the handlebars while you got used to pedaling. Then they might hold the back of the seat, and let go as you gained speed. The training wheels were there to give you the confidence to try it.

This thing that Jesus asked of them was, in essence, an apprenticeship. It was trying to do what Jesus did, but with the training wheels on.

And Jesus actually outfitted the bicycle of this experience not with two wobbly training wheels like the ones we had as children, but with six:

- You don't do it alone.
- You don't need fancy stuff to do it.
- You'll find friends and supporters along the way.
- You won't always be successful, but that's okay.
- Jesus will always be with you.
- It's okay to take a break.

It's wise to remember those training wheels, because, as I told you last week, we are all called to carry on Jesus' work in the world. And it's daunting, I know. But there are training wheels as we apprentice with our Master Jesus.

It may have felt like a time of standing still when we were in the pandemic and when things got a little crunchy around here. But somehow, even when things were crunchy, many of us tried to keep pedaling on the way of Jesus, because we sensed that those training wheels, saving graces, were there:

- Many of you worked hard to make this new world of church function. The Vestry leaders, other people who had skills and gifts to do stuff like live-streaming church, supply priests who came in and helped lead worship, and even more. No one had to do it alone.

- Fancy stuff? Well, maybe a little technology stuff to live-stream and such. Maybe changes in the liturgy to keep everyone safe. But church was still church. Ministries were still going on, and while there may have been some new tools, once you bolted on those training wheels, you were ready, set, GO!
- Friends and supporters showed up as well, including some new folks whom you reached because you were doing online church. And folks volunteered to do what they could to support Christ and Grace. And folks kept giving, because the work didn't stop just because we were in the midst of a pandemic.
- No doubt there were hiccups. Days when things didn't work. Days that felt like that children's book, Alexander's Terrible Horrible No Good Day...and then you shook it off and things got worked out and you were back on track.
- ...and one of the reasons was that you knew that Jesus is always with you and loves you HUGELY, and that trust gave you courage when things were feeling shaky.
- And because you are smart people and because there had been so many hard moments, various people took breaks when they needed to and there was someone else to pick up the slack.

And now we are back on an even keel and doing pretty darned well, and our Search Committee is starting its work, and I am blessed to be with you in the months ahead as they complete their work.

Here's what I know, and here's what I pray for:

You've gone through this time with strength and with resilience and you've trusted that Jesus has walked with you. Some of what you've done has felt shaky, but you had the training wheels on when you needed them, asking for help from diocesan staff, looking for gifts and skills from among the congregation, offering grace when things didn't go as well as you liked.

I'd say that Christ and Grace has found its balance in many ways. The training wheels are hardly needed at all. But we're still pedaling – we're always riding to the next thing God has in mind for us – so let's keep those training wheels handy for when we need them, especially the part about trusting that Jesus is always with us. Let's pedal toward the future, one where everybody is loved, no exceptions, together. Be amazed at how those training wheels got you started, and look at you go!

Amen.