

I was asking the folks at the Wednesday service today if any of them had ever felt “sent” by God.

I know, that’s a hard question to answer. On the one hand—if you don’t have an exciting tale to tell about God sending you—what will everyone think?

Or ---what if you DO have an exciting tale to tell—and everyone thinks you’re bragging. Or WORSE: Everyone will think you sound like Paul does this morning---full of self-confidence and with an all too-healthy ego-- and boasting about the *Exceptional Character of [his] Revelations*.

Most people, including me I might add-- don’t talk so much about being sent by God as much as perhaps feeling a pull from God to go somewhere or do something.

Pulling sounds like God is putting a whole lot of effort into getting our attention, doesn’t it?

“Come on! You can do it.” Pulls. Strains. “Really. Let’s go!”

Sounds like maybe some of us aren’t so eager to be either pulled OR sent. I mean—after all—we could be getting into a situation like with Ezekiel—where God sends him to a “rebellious house”—with news that is bound to make them take the leap from *rebellious* to positively blood-thirsty.

No thanks.

I have a feeling that when it comes right down it to-- being “sent” by God makes us uneasy.

After all, our memories of being “Sent” places are probably not very positive. We are “sent” to bed. Some are “sent” to boarding school. We are sent away. So—being “sent” doesn’t sound like very much fun. After all--- we aren’t *sent* to the movies! We aren’t *sent* to Hawaii. You know?

And so the disciples are sent.

Jesus gives them a “pep talk”. “I’m going to send you out in two’s.”

Well, that’s not so bad. At least they won’t be alone

“Pack light,” Jesus says. “No emergency cash. No food. Not even a change of clothing. Only stay with those who invite you in.”

This means that the disciples won’t go out in strength, they go out in weakness. They will carry no weapons, so they will be vulnerable to those who might harm them. They will carry no money, so they will be vulnerable to privation and hunger. They will only stay with those who invited them in—what if no one invites them in? Bandits and wolves will see their weakness.

Jesus understands their trepidation. But he also understands that there is magic in vulnerability.

Why?

If a person comes in strength—say---with money and fine clothes—they inevitably gravitate to those who are like them. They will never really understand, or worse-- be able to *reach* those in need. Who wants to listen to a person who will never understand them?

If a person comes in force, bearing weapons, or speaking words that demonstrate that they are part of the current power structure, they will be unable to breach the gap with those who feel powerless.

Jesus didn't court the powerful. He didn't stay in palaces, or with the rich in the community. He didn't take advantage of the fine food, and advancement opportunities that only come to those who socialized with the well-placed.

He came to the Jews who were barely tolerated in their own towns by the occupiers of their nation. He came to the women, healing them, sharing ministry with them, and listening to the women's stories in a time when no other male found anything to gain from conversation with them.

He came for the poor, whom many called lazy. He came for the sick, the voiceless ones, the lame, the untouchables. And the disciples had watched him.

But know it's their turn. Jesus knows that watching isn't enough. They have to become vulnerable. It would be too easy to fall back on what might separate them from their neighbors. So they go without money or food or shelter—like Jesus did. They are vulnerable, in every sense of the word.

They discover that when they allow themselves to be open and unguarded with the people they meet, the people are also willing to be open. They find that they spend a lot of time listening to them speak of their lives. Their joys. Their struggles.

I think that the disciples learned that how much **THEY** were changed by being willing to listen, and remaining vulnerable with all the people they encountered. They were learning to love their neighbor.

Jesus' friends finally understood what he had been trying to teach them: when you are finally willing to open your heart with others, you realize that none of us can be healed until all of us are healed.

This insight opened their hearts even more, until they finally began seeing things from Jesus' perspective. They shared this insight with those they met, and changed them, too.

In the end, many of the demons that they, and others, carried with them: rage, the need for power and all of the other demons we still carry with us, were cast out. Sicknesses were healed. They realized that real power doesn't come from strength. It comes from shared vulnerability.

It comes from traveling light, opening ourselves to God and others, and taking along a friend for the journey.

Now we are all sent. Our very weaknesses will be our strength. Let's go.