

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Mission and Service

Scripture: Luke 4:16-21

October 4th, 2020

Ch. 4 Risk-Taking Mission and Service

By Bishop Robert Schnase

Last week, we discussed Intentional Faith Development through illustrations of music and explaining our faith as a journey through life. We looked at 2 Corinthians to see how Intentional Faith Development is expressed through our communal worship and practice of our faith with one another. This week we shift our focus through the theme, *Risk-Taking Mission and Service*. We will look at the Gospel of Luke to hear Jesus speak a powerful sermon that was not well received by the people. Lastly, we will look at the hymn, "This is My Song," and learn together how the lyrics and message of this hymn reflect our theme of togetherness and connection on World Communion Sunday.

In 2012, I graduated from Emory & Henry College. It had been quite the journey as I had stayed an extra year in school to complete and receive my double major in Religion and History. I was completely burnt out and ready to get away from school and my studies for a couple years until I was ready to go to grad school, but before I took my rest and relaxation and entered the work force, I was able to take a trip that forever changed my life.

Every four years, our music department at Emory & Henry College took an international tour. In my first year of college, I did not participate in their trip to Western Europe because I did not join the concert choir that allowed you to participate in the trip, but since I stayed that extra year, I was able to go to China where the music department would hold concerts in the cities of Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, Suzhou, and Tongli. It was an experience of a lifetime, but there was a particular story that reminded me about our theme of mission and service today.

While in Shanghai, we were touring many of the popular attractions like Huangpu River, we toured Wai Tan that had the French/Chinese

architecture, some of us attended a special tea presentation where we tried many different teas from the surrounding tea farms, and we toured the Yu Garden in between our concerts. There were a couple of us that were a little more adventurous and we wandered off the main tourist roads of Shanghai with our choir director and we stumbled on a small music store. When we walked in, we knew we had discovered something special because the small store was filled with traditional Chinese instruments hanging on all the walls and displays. The owner walked up to us and looked a little nervous as he said, "Hello," in English.

We said we did not speak Mandarin Chinese and indicated so, but he just nodded. He said, "English" and shook his head, indicating he did not know much English, but he held his finger up like he was encouraging us to wait. He spent the next 30 minutes giving us a free concert by picking up each different instrument in the store and showing us how to play it, what it sounded like, and telling us about it, even though we obviously couldn't understand one another as he was speaking in Mandarin. Our language barrier didn't matter, because in that moment, we connected with one another. It didn't matter we had no clue what the other was saying, because he could tell from our reactions we were engaged and enjoying his music. It didn't matter that we couldn't understand every word he was saying, because all that mattered was he was taking the time out of his day to show us part of who he was, his culture, and his way of seeing the world through his music. He was using his gifts and talents to show us a part of his life. On World Communion Sunday, I am reminded of the sacredness of this precious moment in my life where we connected through music and transcended the barriers which separated us.

In today's scripture, we hear Jesus calling us to be of service to the world and connect with those who share different experiences than ourselves. This story takes place at the very beginning of the Gospel of Luke. It follows the story of the Temptation of Jesus. In many cultures across the globe, leaders would leave their community and traverse through the wilderness before going back to their communities to lead their people. Jesus does just that as one of the first cities he visits in the beginning of his ministry is Nazareth, which was his birthplace, his home, to speak the good news to his people. He quotes the prophet Isaiah, who in Isaiah 61, is referencing (verses 18-19 in today's reading) Leviticus 25. This is important to draw these scriptural connections because the Law, or the Torah, is the foundation of the Jewish faith. Jesus was calling his people to return to their roots. And what did their roots look like? Preaching the good news to the poor, proclaiming the release of those in captivity, recovering the sight to

those who had been blinded, and to liberate those who were oppressed (Luke 18-19).

At first, everyone looks at Jesus and they are stunned. Everyone is amazed at how his teaching has fulfilled the words of scripture and captured the traditions of his people. They even ask each other, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?" (Luke 4:22). This was the carpenter's boy to these people. Maybe some of these folks were even friends of Mary or friends of Joseph. They were amazed because this was no longer the boy they had once known, but he was now a man quoting and teaching scripture in the synagogue, leading his people.

Jesus continues in his teaching by talking about a story in 1 Kings 17. It is the story of Elijah going to a widow's home where the widow feeds Elijah and her son with the last bit of bread they have left. This was important because they were in the midst of a terrible draught spreading poverty, famine, and sickness across the land, but regardless, she breaks bread with a stranger. Her son becomes sick and Elijah heals him and thus, saves his life. The message Jesus shares from Isaiah and Leviticus and the story Jesus concludes with about Elijah illustrates our theme of Risk-taking mission and service. It is a theme that dates back to the time of the Israelites wandering in the desert, and it is a theme that continues through the time of the prophets and in Jesus' ministry.

In both stories, Levitical law and with Elijah, we are called to see the service one provides to a stranger. We are called to give food to our neighbors in need. We are called to love our neighbors and support as if they are one of us. In both these stories, we hear a message of looking out for each other in our times of need instead of only worrying about our own needs and desires. Bishop Schnase describes our mission and service to others as helping those in need because it is the moral and ethical thing to do. We do not help those in need so they will attend our worship services, be on a committee we need volunteers for, or provide us a skill that we lack (Schnase p. 83). We help those in need because this is our calling and our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ to be more like Jesus as we spread the principles of compassion, empathy, and love to one another.

Bishop Schnase says, "Mission reminds congregations that Christ's compassion, grace, mercy, and love extend to the entire world, and these fruits are cultivated not only within the walls of the church or among the people of the Body of Christ who are regularly seen and already known" (Schnase p. 85). This past week, Greg printed off an excel sheet dictating all the services our money for our conference apportionments support. Even in

little Glendive/Wibaux, Montana, we support the World Service fund of the UMC. We support the Methodist Educational Fund which help fund Methodist scholarships like the scholarships I received at both Emory & Henry and Iliff School of Theology, and they help fund Africa University, which is a university founded by the UMC in Mutare, Zimbabwe. These funds support historically black colleges and administrative costs for the conference. They help fund all the ministries here in the Western Jurisdiction and our Mountain Sky Conference, which help our district and local churches. It is our mission to be a church that serves the needs of others through our giving of financial resources, our time and energy to support and volunteer in our communities, and it is our mission to use our gifts and talents to spread our love into our communities here in worship, on our committees, and in our community. We are the Church!

Today, we celebrate World Communion Sunday. This was first celebrated in 1933. Think of what we were experiencing as a country and as a world in 1933. There was a global depression affecting people all across the globe. The beginnings of World War II were starting to take shape. Infrastructure throughout our country was crumbling as the Industrial Revolution had left workers high and dry and globalization had left people behind as they couldn't keep up with the ever-changing world. Our world was rapidly changing into something new, but we started a tradition that we still continue today by celebrating communion together as a world.

The hymn, "This is My Song," has such a beautiful story. I won't share all its history, but the song we know today was essentially composed by three different people. Jean Sibelius, a phenomenal Finnish composer of the late 19th and early 20th century, composed this piece in protest to the Russian oppression of the Finnish people in 1899, as Tsar Nicholas II deemed Finland as property of Russia. Sibelius composed the song *Findlandia* in protest. The hymn melody is the choral section from this piece.

Lloyd Stone, an American public-school teacher, wrote the first two stanzas to be published in a book of poems. He wrote this poem in between the two world wars as he, and many others, hoped the world would remain in peace with one another. Lastly, Georgia Harkness, one of the first women ever to be ordained and widely considered one of the most important female theologians in the church, wrote the last verse because she wanted to add a more spiritual element to a largely secular song. Each of these contributions to the song made it the beautiful hymn we sing today.

As we conclude today, and partake in the Holy Sacrament of communion, we remember that we are a part of a global community in the United Methodist Church. We are made up of all ethnicities, languages, perspectives, and countries. We do not always understand one another's customs or traditions, but each and everyone of us is invited to participate in the love of the gospel of Jesus Christ together. We are all welcomed to the table of Grace by Jesus' love for humanity. We are Church. Amen.