

Pilgrims, Not Tourists

Commissioning of the Twelve

Amos 7:12-15

Psalm 85: 9-10, 11-12, 13-14

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:7-13

We are called to be pilgrims on a journey, not tourists ...

Have you ever felt called to do something that seemed larger than yourself? Can you recall a time that you felt like you, literally, were doing God's work? As you consider what it would look like if you lived your life as if God was working *through* you, you're actually considering your calling ... your ministry ... your life as pilgrimage.

Today's readings give us two such calls to ministry. In our first reading we hear the call of Amos, the visionary who was called by God from his work as a "shepherd and dresser of sycamores" to one of prophesy. Amos is told to "go, prophesy to my people Israel." And while Amos does not accept Amaziah's understanding of being a prophet, Amos transforms the institution of prophecy by his doing.¹

In the Gospel we have the sending of the twelve apostles. This section of the Gospel is in between two stories of the rejection of prophets—Jesus rejected in his hometown and the killing of John the Baptist. Thus sending them out two by two and perhaps reminding them that no matter how grim the times become, the people of God must continue their work. They were sent out to live and proclaim so that God can work through them. They were called to go and proclaim repentance, to denounce evil, to anoint and to cure. They were to be dependent on others, to travel light. While they were sent on mission, some might say they were pilgrims, people who set out on a journey for a particular destination.

To approach our lives as pilgrims on a journey and not tourists has important and revolutionary implications. This morning, I want to lift up just three: traveling lightly, depth of companionship and hospitality.

¹ Carol Stuhlmueller., "Amos" in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*. Collegeville, MN. 1989. 494.

Meet Anna and Joe, they are a delightful couple who met, got married, moved to the suburbs and had two kids. Anna volunteers two days a week at the kids' school and works part-time at the local bakery. Joe is a full-time carpenter who works all week on job sites and takes extra shifts and side jobs. The extra income provides for the kids' activities.

Their two kids play on school and “traveling” sports teams. In addition, both are in scouts and band. Between work, school, practices, games and meetings, Anna and Joe's household requires precise coordination. It runs a bit like Grand Central Station. One train running behind time can derail the whole system. Their schedule is heavy, 'busy,' and though they love it, it is burdensome.

Anna and Joe want their children to have great experiences and the best chances for college and future jobs, but their schedules leave little time to take a train traveling in a different direction. There are few, if any, opportunities for detours or exploration. Anna and Joe are living as tourists in their own lives, checking off lists of things to see and do, cramming as much into each week as possible.

Living our baptismal call to ministry, living as if we are *called* by God, like the disciples and as pilgrims, allows God to work through us and requires that we be open to the detours and experiences that present themselves. Pilgrims travel lightly, “taking nothing for the journey,” not even expectations. Pilgrims remain totally dependent on the *other*, they are to be open to the detours, explorations and persons that cross their paths.

To *travel lightly* means more than limiting the physical and material “stuff” that keeps you bound. It means remaining free enough to hear the other person(s) you encounter without your own judgements or knee-jerk responses. When we find ourselves over committed and over scheduled without time to meaningfully interact with the world, we are tourists in our own lives. When an overabundance of extra-curricular activities and social commitments keep us from living life with the people we see every day, we are tourists in our own lives. When we slow down, set down and let go, appreciating that our life is an opportunity to do God's work and allow God to work through us, we begin to encounter the world as a pilgrim.

Anna and Joe—and if we are honest with ourselves, maybe each one of us—fall into the temptation of being transactional with time and people, just like tourists. Being tied to activity and productivity rarely leaves space to interact at a level of depth. Cultivating companionship and deep relationship is the work of a pilgrim and not a tourist. Seeing oneself as a pilgrim can take shape in many ways. It can be answering more fully rather than saying, “busy,” when someone asks how we are. It can be skipping practice, a tournament, a social obligation or work function in favor of family time or a date night. The approach of a pilgrim requires periodically trading our work and regular routine for re-creation, a re-engagement with the story of our own identity at a deep level.

To be a pilgrim also calls us to *create depth-filled relationships with companions*. To be a companion *on* the journey and to have a companion *for* the journey offers much. Companions are partners who give strength and require accountability. To be a pilgrim and not a tourist is to build relationships of depth rather than conducting mere friendly transactions with others.

But creating this depth – to be a companion and to have companions on our journey – comes with a great challenge. Companionship requires a very high level of acceptance, which is something that can be hard to come by. Unconditional acceptance of another implies accepting unconditional love. To accept that we can be loved unconditionally by someone who does not owe us and whom we cannot repay, affirms the truth we seek to avoid: that each day we are completely dependent on the love of God. We hear the echo of the responsorial psalm, “Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.”

Being a pilgrim calls us to trust in our companions’ goodness, to listen and to encounter them as they come to us ... just as they are.

This trust, companionship—accepting and offering unconditional love—is the first step in hospitality. To offer and receive *hospitality* is a mark of pilgrimage. We welcome the stranger along the way, not in a transactional way, but in a way that allows us to be changed. To receive hospitality is oftentimes harder than giving it, for it requires radical vulnerability and honesty with ourselves. We must acknowledge our hopes, fears, joys and sorrows and then have the trust to share them with another. In the sharing, there is healing. In the sharing, we find love. A tourist brings their baggage. A pilgrim shares their story.

To know another's story and to share our own draws us closer into loving relationship. In doing so, the stranger ceases to be *other*, and instead, becomes a part of you. The humility of a pilgrim requires us to acknowledge that we are made for others and cannot define ourselves or even know ourselves more deeply without the help of others along the way. When we accept the call to hospitality, we are called to a transformation of ourselves. As pilgrims we are passing through many places on our way to our final place, yet, what remains, is our presence. We rely not only on the hospitality of strangers, but ultimately, we must trust in God.

Being a pilgrim—traveling lightly, having companions and depths in our relationships, and extending and accepting hospitality—is actually a calling to build the Reign of God right here in our midst. In the daily work we do, in the lives we lead at home and at work, God calls us to be in community with one another, to proclaim light in the dark places of this world and to bring repentance, peace and justice.

This is our call: to build the Reign of God and carry out the evangelizing mission. As pilgrims of the Church, let us recall the words from today's reading of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, "In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ. In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy spirit ..." May this Eucharist draw us closer and help us *be* pilgrims on a journey.