

Sermon: John 4  
"Let's Go"

© The Rev. Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church La Plata/Wayside  
Way of Love 6, Sunday October 25, 2020

*Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.*

Today we look at the sixth practice in the Way of Love: Go.

Go is a short word, but a big idea – it's not only about where we go,  
but our willingness to leave what we know, what's comfortable.

To "Go" in Jesus' mission is to cross boundaries of difference into unknown places.

We do this in varying ways all our lives, some of us more than others.

For instance, our Senior Warden, Larry Poe, has been forced to cross boundaries  
of difference all his life, living in a country that defined him as "other" by race.

He grew up in a large family in a small town in North Carolina, on a road  
where the pavement ended two blocks away at the end of the "white section."

He crossed boundaries of difference and took a risk every time he crossed into the  
paved part of that road. Later, he was among the first six people of color to attend  
the University of North Carolina – continually crossing boundaries of difference.

When we entered the Navy, he and Barbara found themselves  
crossing cultural boundaries, in Guam, Viet Nam and other places.

Still later in an illustrious career, Larry was named Defense Attaché at our  
embassy in Paris – not a hardship post, but another set of boundaries to cross  
for a couple raised in small town southern America.

His last military assignment was in Iraq as Ambassador Paul Bremer's first  
inspector General after the war there. Boundaries of difference abounded.

Larry and Barbara's story is more dramatic than some,  
but we all cross boundaries in our lives.

To some extent we cross a boundary at the breakfast table every morning –  
even if we've lived with another person for 35 years, they remain  
essentially a mystery, a distinct and only somewhat knowable "Other."

Crossing boundaries of difference is a given in life.

But there is a difference when we cross boundaries in mission, when we choose,  
to Go in God's mission, following Jesus' command to "Go" –  
"Go and make disciples of all nations," "Go and tell?"

Jesus modeled this for us,

coming from the serenity of heavenly life into our life, as vulnerable as can be.

As he began his ministry, he was constantly on the go.

And he invited those who followed him to leave everything that was familiar and to follow, to go with him. Come and see. Go and tell.

Or in the case of Ananais in our first reading today, to go and minister to someone he had only known as an enemy up to that point. To Go is often to take a risk.

So today we heard a story of Jesus going into the territory of the Other and encountering a woman at a well. He crossed any number of boundaries in this meeting – speaking with her in the first place, asking her for a drink.

As she pointed out, Jews did not normally speak to Samaritans, and Jewish men certainly did not speak with women outside their families.

These two cross boundaries of gender, ethnicity, religious understanding and more in this exchange. Jesus even crosses personal boundaries, telling her things about her private life she had not revealed. And he reveals to her his identity as the Messiah – to a Samaritan woman? That's extraordinary!

Even more extraordinary is what happens next: how this woman, having had this powerful God experience, without hesitation crosses the boundaries of difference that separated her from her townspeople, that caused her to be out fetching water in the noonday heat when she stood little chance of running into anyone.

She leaves her bucket – leaves behind that thing she came for – and runs back to the people who have made her life miserable, because she needs to tell them that she has met the Messiah.

“Come and see someone who has told me everything I ever did!”

Instead of being shamed, she is empowered.

That's what happens when we encounter God's love for all of who we are – we don't feel ashamed, we get empowered.

Her testimony is persuasive – they come, they prevail on Jesus to stay with them for a couple of days, which requires him to really go beyond his comfort zone, not only talking with a Samaritan woman but actually staying in a Samaritan town? His disciples must have been horrified.

But the townspeople come to believe for themselves, and they say to the woman, “Now it's not just because of what you said that we believe – we believe for ourselves.”

That is the trajectory of faith-sharing my friends – we tell what we've experienced of God and gradually people come to experience God for themselves.

When we have encounters with God, large or small, we have to tell.  
And to tell means to Go and Tell.

To Go out of our comfort zone into a place of difference.  
I'd like you to think of a God story now, large or small –  
could be a time you knew a prayer was answered;  
or a time you sensed God's presence in a hard time or a joyful time;  
or you felt protected in a supernatural way, or nudged to do or say something...  
We all have God stories. Think of one now.

I'm going to invite us to step a tiny bit out of our comfort zones now and go into groups of three or four. If I see anyone is alone, I'll move someone to your room. Just tell your God story, quickly and simply.

Try to get through everyone in the room in three minutes.  
If you choose not to accept the invitation into the breakout room,  
you'll hang out with me we'll have some fun too, but I hope you will go.  
This is an important practice, and we need to practice.

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So how was that? We don't have to create places to go or occasions to go –  
if we're willing to trust the Spirit, God will guide us.  
Sometimes we are called to "go" to someone we know well –  
those can be among the hardest times, as intimacy creates its own barriers.  
And sometimes it's to someone or a group we don't know well,  
but have a heart for helping them to know God's love.

There is another wonderful story about "Go" that we find in the Book of Acts.  
The persecutions of this new Jesus movement, the early church, have begun.  
The first martyrdom, of the deacon Stephen, has happened,  
and the Christ-followers have been scattered all over the region.  
That's what persecution does – it spreads what it's attempting to suppress.

A man named Philip is told by the Spirit to go to a certain road, where he will receive more instructions. He sees an Ethiopian official in a chariot, and the Spirit tells him to run alongside and ask the man if he understands what he's reading. Turns out he's reading Isaiah, and he wants someone to explain it. So Philip climbs in and they talk – and soon enough the official sees some water up ahead and says, "Hey – there's some water. Why can't I be baptized now?" And he is.

I call that an Anointed Appointment, and I believe God has those in store for all of us, if we're willing to ask and be open.

We might experience an inner nudge to call someone or say something; sometimes we're responding to something we have read and seen which touched us; sometimes someone asks for us.

Take those opportunities, friends. Start practicing "Go."

When we start practicing Go in little ways –

man, God has some big opportunities for us to Go.

We will always be empowered by the Spirit, and the Word and the love of God will spread farther than we can ever imagine. If we just Go.

Amen.