

## **From Nomads to Pilgrims** (Luke 9:57-58, 10:1-9)

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“The foxes have holes, the birds of the air their nests, but the Human One has no place to lay his head”. These poignant words of Jesus offer us a glimpse not only into the vocation and calling of the itinerant Rabbi who wandered about Galilee. These words also are a window of insight into the humanness of Jesus and his road weary soul. At this midpoint of Luke’s gospel Jesus’ itinerant ministry takes a startling turn. Jesus and the disciples have been on the move since the beginning of his ministry. But here at this point in Luke’s Gospel, we witness the commissioning of the 70 sent out two by two to all the villages and towns of Galilee. We hear the instructions to the disciples to travel light, and to depend on the hospitality of strangers. The journey continues and if we are disciples of Jesus we too are commissioned to go out into the world. And as we go, we might be asking: Just what does it mean to follow the pilgrim Christ who has no place to lay his head?

Throughout the history of the church, some Christians have heard these words of our itinerant Rabbi and taken them very seriously as an invitation to make a pilgrimage. Jerusalem, the place where Christ walked became the most esteemed destination for pilgrims. The second most popular destination was Rome, where Peter and Paul and many other saints of the early church were martyred. And the third most popular route for pilgrims was El Camino de Campestola. El Camino as it is known or the Way of St. James is a pilgrimage route that stretches across Northern Spain. This pilgrimage route originated from the belief that the remains of the Apostle St. James were carried from Jerusalem by boat and were buried on what is now the site of the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela. The popularity of this ancient pilgrimage route has enjoyed a mysterious resurgence in the last few years. Thousands of pilgrims of every age and motivation make the journey every year, many walking for months or for as long a time as they have. A few weeks ago I shared with you a little about my experience of walking the Camino with a band of pilgrims from all over the world. It was this journey that inspired this series on the spirituality of pilgrimage.

In this sermon series I have tried to make one main essential point in different ways: the people of God are called to pilgrimage. Countless Christians from all over the world have practiced their faith by making a pilgrimage to holy destination. Making pilgrimage remains a compelling practice of the Christian faith because it mirrors the truth that life itself is a sacred journey, a holy pilgrimage. We come from God; we journey to God. And so think with me for a moment: if you were to make a pilgrimage, where would you go? What place beckons you to a journey? Maybe it would be a place that has been important in your past, a home-place, an ancestral habitation or the site of a turning point in your life. Or maybe it would be a place yet unknown to you but which somehow intrigues you, inviting you to discover some unexplored dimension in the world and in yourself. Christians throughout the centuries have learned that a pilgrimage to a holy

place can help us to understand how every place is holy; every step we take on the pilgrimage of our lives is a sacred one.

I guess that is the real point of our Gospel summons to follow the pilgrim Christ. Yes we can go on a pilgrimage and this can be transforming. But we get even closer to the truth when we understand that our very lives are the pilgrimages that we are on. Whether we were born and raised in Elkin; whether we have lived at the same address all of our lives, we are still pilgrims. We have this journey to make. Our God is the alpha, the source of all being from which we spring into life, and God is the omega the destination of our journey and all of our times in between are in God's hands. Not all of us are called to actually hit the road, but all of us are called to be pilgrims; to understand that our lives are a sacred pilgrimage. Whether we live in a fixed place or whether our lives are in motion, it does not matter. The question before us: do you see yourself as a pilgrim? Do you understand your life as a sacred pilgrimage?

What does it mean to be a Christian pilgrim? To be a Christian pilgrim is to be on a path from individualism into community. Because you see, our pilgrimage is not just my journey alone. It is a journey that I make with all the people of God. A few weeks ago I shared with you a little about this amazing band of young people with whom I was privileged to walk the Camino. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Quakers, other Christians, we walked not alone but together. Each morning and each afternoon we would walk for 30 minutes in silence. And strangely it was during those times of silent walking that we felt most together, most united. I am not sure how it happened – maybe it was the gift of silence that allowed us to hear only our common footfalls, our trudging along that created this sense of “we-ness”. But in that silence, a sense of the individual I dropped away and we became a group, a community; we became us. And of course when Jesus called the disciples to follow him they were not summoned to an individual journey. They were summoned to become part of a pilgrim community. Even when he sent them out they went out two by two.

Sometime this past week it hit me. This Gospel story, this commissioning of the 70 disciples to go out into the world happens every single week here in the life of this congregation. This is very pattern of our Christian pilgrimage that takes place in everyday life. Think about the character of Jesus' itinerant ministry. His ministry was a dynamic interplay between moments of engagement in the world followed by retreat into times for prayer and reflection, for nourishment and rest. And here is the most important point that I want to make this morning. This same dynamic of active engagement and spiritual reflection is re-enacted in our life together, each time we gather on Sunday morning. Each Sabbath day, we gather together as a community of disciples around our Rabbi Jesus. We need to talk to him about the world we have encountered, the difficulties we are facing in our own lives. We gather ready to listen to him teach us about the journey we are on. We gather needing to re-anchor our stories in this Gospel story. We need our Rabbi to teach us for we are students of the Gospel for that is what a disciple is- a student. And is this not true worship- to come together and experience a foretaste of homecoming, to be truly welcomed and accepted, to experience hospitality, safety, refuge, to re- discover ourselves once again inside God's story. And then ready or not we

come to the end of worship and we receive a charge and a blessing not so much from your pastor but from Christ himself, and we are sent back into the world not as disciples (students) but as apostles (messengers).

And the same traveling instructions that Jesus gave the first apostles he gives to us. Go out into the world as lambs among wolves! I am convinced that being a lamb among wolves means practicing nonviolence. Being a lamb among wolves means practicing the non-violence of Jesus is our way of being in a violent world. Jesus instructs us to travel light for as I learned on the Camino a pilgrim should not carry too much. Over packing will crush the life of the pilgrim. Materialism, attachment to things will weigh down the spirit of the pilgrim and finally bring the journey to an end. And so we disciples, students who are sent back into the world by our Rabbi Jesus become Apostles engaging the world in mission and ministry of everyday life. And then another Sunday rolls around and we return to Jesus; we gather together again as disciples, we reconnect to Him and to one another. We are taught by our Rabbi, we are nourished by hospitality of his table fellowship and then it begins all over again. You see our Gospel text, the story of the commissioning of the 70 happens every single week when Christ who commissions us with a charge and a benediction. A number of you have said to me that you find the words of our charge meaningful to you. It is not me but the Risen Christ who says to each one of us: “Go out into the world in peace, have courage, hold fast to that which is good, return no evil for evil, strengthen the faint-hearted, support the weak, help the suffering, honoring everyone, rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit”. So go out into that world as pilgrims who follow the Human One who has no place to lay his head. And then come back next week as we re-gather around our rabbi Jesus. The pilgrim journey continues each day, each week. To be pilgrim congregation is finally to be a bridge by which people can move from being simply nomads to pilgrims; can move from being spiritual tourists to faithful disciples.

You see we are sometimes in danger of forgetting who we are and whose we are. And so to be a Christian pilgrim is to be on a path from amnesia to remembering the story that you are living. If you are a follower of Jesus, then it is this Gospel story which is the deepest narrative at the core of your life. This is the journey you are on. Yes there are all the twists and turns in the plot line of your life. But underneath all the particulars of your life, who you married or didn't marry, where you went to school, where you work, where you live, all the movements of your life, there is this story unfolding; this gospel story. To be a Christian pilgrim means to look upon your life as a sacred journey. To be a Christian pilgrim means seeing your life as an unfolding discipleship story taken step by step, in the company of Jesus; this Human One who has no place to lay his head.