



Date: June 9, 2024

Homilist: The Rev. Alanna M. Van Antwerpen, [SpiritBound Digital Mission](#)

Liturgical Date/Readings: Third Sun after Pentecost, Proper 5, Year B: Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

Community: 8:00, 9:30am Christ Church Episcopal, Exeter, NH

Sources: [workingpreahcer.org](#); [textweek.org](#); quotes Roosevelt/Mother Teresa

Graduation season is upon us. It is a busy time for families, celebrating the joy of accomplishments, hard earned recognition...and maybe even a few sighs of relief! I was at my nephew and daughter's graduations this week, looking in awe at the young adults they've grown into from the toddlers running around causing mischief.

As you all know, and many celebrated yesterday, in the church it is also Ordination Season. Ordination Season usually falls just around June or July for those ordained to the transitional diaconate before being ordained priests. Today, Christ Church celebrates this sacred passage as The Rev. Nicole grows more fully into her ministry here with you all and her vocation as a minister in the Episcopal Church. These times of change and rites of passage bring much joy, anticipation, and gratitude.

Without a doubt graduations *and* ordinations are not only events for individuals, but for entire community initiating a new season of life, a new rhythm of relationship. This new season of ministry and rhythm of relationship is where we find Jesus in our Gospel reading today. Jesus is in the region of Galilee initiating a new season in his ministry. Immediately before this passage, Jesus is preaching, teaching, and healing...and sometimes doing these things on the sacred day of the sabbath. He has also just called the twelve "who he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message."

Well, as you could imagine, this new season of ministry begins to attract people seeking Good News, people seeking healing and hope. At its best, any new season brings new life, and not only draws people forward on a path, but together in companionship. It is the power of this magnetic pull that *also causes* people to begin to say Jesus, "has gone out of his mind."

Yet, in this moment, Jesus does not disparage their concerns, but rather addresses them directly. This is one of the great lessons of our savior: to teach even when it is uncomfortable; to invite a new perspective even when his own family is concerned, wanting "to restrain him".

Like Jesus, not every new season in our lives brings a smooth ride. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." Amid this tension, Jesus invites people to draw closer in getting to know him. He harnesses the power of tension to instruct those in his

presence about who he is, about the nature of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness, and ultimately the nature or definition of family. In this one interaction he initiates a new perspective about how God is showing up in the world.

As followers of Jesus' way of love, it is worth asking what sustains us when seasons change in our lives bringing challenges or opportunities for growth? As a church community, it's important to ask what are *the best practices* we have as a community of faith?

One response is that this is the gift of our rituals and worship. Those times we gather, bringing our whole, authentic selves to the table so that God might hold us in care, and that we might be nourished by the community of faith can sustain us. Not too long ago when speaking to my own father, who is now in his mid-eighty's, he said of going to his daily Roman Catholic Mass, "'I really enjoy going every day, it is so different than when I was younger, I get so much out of it.'" This brought a smile to my face. In my dad's experience I heard him living into the invitation of a season of spiritual maturity. For him a practice that was once done out of habit has transformed into an experience of complete joy and love.

It is funny how hearing someone else's story of faith can also sustain and nourish us; for that matter, sharing our own story of faith. This is the powerful relationship between believing and speaking that we hear St. Paul talking about in the letter to Corinthians. Recognizing our human frailty, Paul reminds us that the spirit of faith that is *in* scripture is also alive and speaking *in* us.

So it is that during each different season of our life and ministry we are called to speak the hope of Christ. We are called to be a presence of love and compassion even in the tensions in our world, and our lives. Until a few years ago, this practice of sharing the good news, or saying *the word* 'evangelism' made me nervous. We Episcopalians are not the 'Bible thumping' or 'altar calling' kind of community. Yet, over the last few years, I have discovered that this witness comes up in all sorts of everyday ways. A lot of living in our church has to do with showing up, cultivating our awareness of God's presence. As mother Teresa once said, "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies."

In this season of ministry in the Episcopal Church, being faithful in small things means being willing to experiment and try *old things in a new way* or embody *entirely new expressions* of ministry. As some of you know, over the last few years, part of my ministry has been discerning with the bishop and wider Episcopal Church of New Hampshire what is traditionally called "the mission field" in our midst. As an outgrowth of the pandemic, and realizing that the mission field in New Hampshire is the group of people the Pew research center calls the "nones," (non-church) the ministry of SpiritBound Digital Mission has emerged. SpiritBound is an online start up church community focusing on elevating the best of the Episcopal tradition through "contemplation, curiosity, and conversation". In this season of our wider society, SpiritBound is another entry point for relationship with God in the community of faith for people who might be reluctant to attend church in-person. Instead of calling these people 'nones', I've found them to be 'spiritually curious' in my ministry in NH. SpiritBound is also a way for people who are *already involved in church* to easily invite their spiritually curious family and friends to experience the church in a new way. This Digital Faith Community is an outward and visible sign of how the ECNH is investing in this new season of our life together.

Like Jesus entering a new season of ministry, and Paul reminding us that we experience grace through our witness, it is the very *practice of speaking our faith* in the eternal hope of new life that transforms into nourishing strength on our journey. It is the *very practice of living faithfully* that is the word of witness the *world needs* of Christ's love. As a community of faith Christ Church is well practiced at these things through your Adult Education forums, the monthly Men's Group and Oasis Women's group, through your hospitality with the Pine Street Players and presence in Cuba.

So, as Christ Church enters more fully into this new season of ministry may you listen for how God is calling you forward into living faithfully. As you experience the gifts and challenges of this new season, may Jesus' curiosity and presence be a strength as you walk the way of love in his name proclaiming *you are* Christ's family of faith. Amen.