

## Matthew 9:35-10:8 2020

I remember when our youngest left home. He was 18, just graduated from high school. He packed up what he had – which wasn't much – and put it into an old clunker car that his grandfather had given to him.

We had lots of family there that weekend to send him off. When he drove off – this 6'3" 200-pound 18-yr-old – I was so aware of his vulnerability. It was all I could do to stop myself from running after him shouting 'no, no, don't go.' He sure seemed like a sheep without a shepherd, heading out to the wolves. I knew how much he needed a shepherd. Yet, it was time.

We always told the kids that we wanted them to go to college, and we'd send them; but, if they didn't choose to go, they'd have to get a job and start their lives. And we'd observed from the other kids that the sooner they got started, the sooner they had the opportunity to grow into adulthood.

And, too, he wasn't really going off into the great unknown; he was just driving from southern California to Oregon to move in with his sister and her husband. Still. It was so hard.

So the words in today's gospel – especially because it's Father's Day – pull at those heartstrings. God, the Father. Jesus, the Son. And -- Jesus, God among us, sending those disciples out in their vulnerability.

We'd prepared Jeff in every way we could. Yet, we all know that teenagers can be a bit resistant. I imagine that even though Jesus gave those disciples power to heal, and all that advice, from what we know of them, everything couldn't have gone that well all the time. Jesus must have known it wouldn't be easy; later in the passage, he even gave them instructions for when bad stuff happened.

But still, Jesus sent them out. Sooner or later, it's time for kids to try things on their own. And, although God in the Holy Spirit is always there with us, we all have to get out there, make our own mistakes and hopefully learn from them.

Maybe because it's Father's Day,  
 I'm aware that God the Father is an image that is quite basic to our faith.  
 I went through a time when I was especially affected by how masculine  
 the images are in traditional Christianity.  
 I hated using the 'he' pronoun – it seemed so limiting.  
 And while it is true that God is not limited to being 'male'  
 I no longer avoid using the masculine pronoun in referring to God.  
 God is, of course, so much more than that.  
 Sometimes I use the feminine pronoun to refer to the Holy Spirit,  
 just to broaden things out a bit.

But, I've come to appreciate the masculine of God.  
 Creator, protector. Wise and strong. Yet, compassionate.  
 He wanted to help. Out of love, he gave the disciples the gifts they would need.  
 As a father does for his children. And, out of love, he sent them out.  
 He didn't go with them. He knew they needed to do it on their own.

I think it's interesting that in today's sending, it was just about casting out demons  
 and healing. No teaching. No food or money to give out. Just healing.

What might that look like for us today?  
 It suggests we **not** concentrate on converting, perhaps. Just healing.  
 In our multi-faith, multi-cultural, broken world, there is much need for healing.  
 It is about joining others in addressing the broken hearted –  
 those who struggle for justice, and meaning, and are without hope.

And, God our Father, with the Son, through the Holy Spirit, can heal through us.  
 What does a healing encounter look like, to provide insight without imposing it?

The instructions to those disciples begin in the faith that God is at work in the world  
 and we are to join that activity.  
 Not to carry extra shirts is to trust the activity of God.  
 We don't have all the necessary information  
 and must be receptive to the knowledge of the stranger.  
 It is more a humble approach to mission.

Like a father – who knows when it's time to stop lecturing  
and to wean away the crutches  
to enable the child to build strong legs, interacting in the world on one's own.

This week I've thought of some of the many father images in the Bible.  
Adam was the first father, and imagine seeing one son kill another.  
Abraham was rewarded with fatherhood at an impossibly advanced age,  
and then he almost sacrificed one son,  
and threw the other one out to wander the desert with his mother.  
We're given Joseph, though, who married his mysteriously-pregnant fiancé  
and helped to raise a most extraordinary boy!

My favorite father, though, is the father of the prodigal son.  
Showing us the healing of love, acceptance, forgiveness.  
Isn't that what I'd seek in my own father?  
Understanding and welcome even when I've messed up?  
Isn't that what we seek and obtain from God – forgiveness and eternal love?  
What a great way to express what is needed in this troubled time.  
Healing love, expressed as we listen and help bring justice to all.

Today we honor our Father God, as well as our own fathers.  
In thanks, in compassion, in love.