

Sermon: John 4:3-43  
"Going, Going, Gone"

© The Rev. Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church La Plata/Wayside  
6 Epiphany, Year C, Sunday, February 17, 2019

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

What if I told you to get out of here? Scram. Go. Not very welcoming,  
not very pastoral. But perhaps more like what Jesus would say to us.

Churches are always trying to get people to come in,  
when the energy we see in the Gospels and in Acts goes the other way.  
I've spent more than my share of time and energy trying to attract strangers to the church –  
and have come to realize, as have people wiser than me – that we would do better to  
connect with folks "out there," and make friends who then join us in here.

I would go so far as to say there is no point cultivating the other practices  
we've explored in the Way of Love – turn, learn, pray, worship, bless –  
if we're not willing to embrace this practice: Go.

"Go" is what Jesus told his followers. Go and preach. Go and heal. Go and tell.  
He led them out, away from home and jobs, out onto the road. That's where he met most of  
the people we see in the Gospels – they run up to him, they see him coming, they are with  
him on the road. He is always going from one place to another, and having healing encounters.  
How did we get the notion that we are "church" sitting in here?  
My friends, we are called to be "church" Monday through Saturday.  
This is not church; this is our filling station, or check-in, our reconnection time.  
This gathering is essential to our faith and our ministry, but this is not church.  
If this is all the church we are, we will atrophy. God needs his church out there all week.

So, when we go, where do we go? Sometimes we feel a nudge, or an energy surge.  
Sometimes God makes it really clear. I told you about my friend Martha and how she  
kept getting bombarded with messages, even dreams, about Uganda.  
She ended up going on a mission trip there, and started amazing ministries that  
are transforming the lives of children, families, whole villages. She went.  
One transformed person transforms communities.

My friend Susan felt a strong call to go to Liberia during the civil war there.  
Our church raised \$60,000 in two months to send her, buy her a vehicle; she connected with  
the local bishop there – that's how Episcopalians do mission, through local dioceses.  
She ended up starting an amazing ministry of healing play with children in refugee camps.  
She met her husband there, and later they went on to run a ministry with children in Bolivia.  
And then they each felt called to the priesthood, so they came back to Virginia Theological  
Seminary, became ordained – and David now oversees missionaries for the whole  
Episcopal Church. His job is to help others to Go. Isn't God amazing?

Going with God, acting on those Holy Spirit nudges that Martha and Susan felt,  
can be risky. This story we heard from Acts brings that home.

Saul, later called Paul, was a Pharisee and he was persecuting Jesus followers. He felt they were dangerous, distorting the truth of God's Torah. He is on his way to Damascus with authority to arrest Christian when he sees a flash of light and hears a voice he knows is Jesus say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Ananias is one of those Christ-followers in Damascus, and when the Spirit tells him to go to this man, he says, "No way! He's trying to hurt us. He'll arrest me." But God tells him, "I've told him to expect you." So Ananias goes and meets Saul. Imagine the mutual suspicion in that room. But Ananias tends to his enemy, and the chief architect of Christian theology as we understand it becomes baptized and eventually one of the most powerful agents of the very movement he's been trying to suppress. I don't know if we would be here were it not for Paul. Which means, we would not be here were it not for Ananias, and his saying "yes" to God's call to Go.

To go in God's name almost always means pushing past the familiar.

Often it's cross-cultural; it's often inconvenient. Going with Jesus almost always takes us out of our own circles into another person's world. That can be intimidating.

We see this in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman he met at that well – what a rich story of two people talking past each other, defensive, suspicious of each other, circling around until they arrive at the truth. He's a little pushy, she keeps changing the subject. But he manages to tell her truth about herself, and Her defenses drop.

And then he tells her he is the Messiah her people have been awaiting – and she believes.

She runs back to the townspeople she's probably trying to avoid by being out there at high noon – not when you usually get water. And she introduces them to Jesus. They meet him, and ask him to stay for a few days. And even though they are the "other," he does.

And then they come to believe for themselves. One transformed person transforms a community.

All over this story we see "Go" at work.

To embrace the spiritual practice of Go means we need to get out of our comfort zones, out of the familiar. God is always calling us out to meet him in the unfamiliar.

This is a principle of spiritual life. The times of resting are brief, and then we're back out on the road to the next place Jesus is about to show up.

As we go, we go with God – we take our relationship with God with us.

In fact, our only real purpose in Going is to bring Jesus into situations, introduce him to people, bring that healing power that accompanies us because Christ dwells in us.

Some years ago I read a book that galvanized me – about a big and bustling church in England that outgrew its sanctuary. As construction started, they needed to vacate the building for 8 months, so they tried something they'd been thinking about for awhile – mission-shaped communities. They asked leaders to identify groups or circumstances to which they felt called – Young mothers, immigrant groups, skateboarders, ex-cons – and invited them to gather groups of parishioners to go and be church among those people, in the places they congregated. They would go and hang out, build connections, hold simple worship services in cafes and park benches, and introduce people to Jesus in their own places, not asking them to come into unfamiliar buildings at inconvenient times.

These “mission-shaped communities” became mini-churches, and people joined. And by the time they got back into the expanded sanctuary, it was already too small, because all these new people wanted to be part of the big church too.

What if we did something like that? We’re talking about outreach to youths who are homeless, or aging out of foster care. We don’t know exactly what form our outreach will take, but I imagine mentoring and support will be a big part of it. It needs to be relational. Maybe we’ll find a safe and neutral space to offer that.

How would we go about forming relationships beyond these walls? Jessica is in a book group... maybe some of you are too. Maybe some of those people would want to join you in an outreach ministry, and as we get to know them, we make Christ known.

The question would be,  
“How might I support you in... how might we support you in?  
“Rev Kate would love to come and meet us and find out how she can support us in parenting small children; in adjusting to retirement; in ... “

We don’t know where and to whom Jesus is inviting us to go –  
He sent his own disciples out to every town and village where he himself was about to go. We’re just Jesus’ advance team, setting up the introductions. But we won’t do anything if we’re not willing to get out of our comfort zones and go.

In fact, I’m going to ask you to do that right now.  
Get up and move to a different seat, preferably on the other side of the church. If movement is difficult for you, stay put or stay close, but let’s see what worship feels like from another seat. And when we arrive there, we will sing and we will pray. And God will be with us.

Amen.

### [John 4:3-30, 39-42](#)

Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."