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Grace, River Forest
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Sheltered and Sent

My friend Brandan and I realized that we just had to go. We got on the megabus in the middle of the night, because those were the cheapest tickets, and set off from Chicago to Minneapolis. We were experiencing a similar crisis of faith. There were new questions rising to the surface of our hearts and some of the old answers just rang hollow. We set off on a pilgrimage of sorts to meet with a pastor who we had connected with through our radio show on the campus radio station. This pastor had started a new kind of church and wrote books about a different kind of Christianity than we had grown up with. He articulated a faith that could withstand ambiguity and the storms of life. Faith that was not afraid of rigorous intellectual and philosophical exploration. Faith that was open to diverse voices and experiences. This pastor helped me see that risk and faith are intertwined. I was introduced to a faith many of you have known for decades.

For me, to go there, and have those conversations and interactions was scary. It can be easier to stay in our own bubbles. Worlds. Siloes. Our own houses that we build with our own two hands. Leaving them sometimes means things have to die. We have to let go of some old stories. Give up a little control. Open ourselves up to something new. Death and resurrection.

This pastor was seen by people in my circles as an outsider to be viewed with suspicion. And, I'm sure he viewed us that way too. Still, he opened his home to two strangers. He offered hospitality, welcome, and peace. His voice proclaimed the good news that I needed to hear.

And this trip was part of the journey that led me to you. Yet, to get here. I could not stay where I was. I had to go.

I was talking with a member of Grace last Sunday and she told me that when she heard about the supreme court decision recently she had to go out. She could not stay in. The original plans she had for the day did not cut it. Something about her faith compelled her to leave her calendar behind. She had to be with others. She had to be on the move. Using her voice and moving her feet.

On Wednesday we will gather here to give thanks for the life of Barbara Rinnan. To remember her and to commend her into the mercy of God. To marvel at the vitality of her faith over so many years. We will tell stories of how her faith moved her to "go." Whether literally or figuratively. US-Russia relations, hurricane relief, and more.

As we heard last week, Jesus had to keep going. His face was set towards Jerusalem. He knew where he was going. After he made his mission clear he gave us ours. With the seventy others at the beginning of Jesus' ministry we have been sent. Luke tells us that Jesus calls them to start walking. Jesus proclaims to us that we are a church on the way as Victor Whetstone would put it. A church of the house and the street.

As much as we might wish to stay inside shielded from this world and all of its challenges: this is not the life of the baptized. It is tempting to want to disengage. To look out the window and close the blinds. To live our lives drawing ever inward in myriad ways.

We have enough going on in our lives just to stay alone with ourselves. Conversing with that endless inner monologue. We face our own pain and loss. Sickness and sorrow. Battles and betrayals. Anger and anxiety. Our own demands and deferred dreams. Confusion and calendars. Enough to keep us company for long enough. We don't have time for anything else.

In our own families we face frayed relationships that mirror our national mood. Where reconciliation seems more and more impossible. And healthy discourse and love across divides seem like sentimental signposts from days gone by. And we cannot resist the urge to retreat.

In our country that so many of us love on the eve of its 246th birthday it seems like this experiment is hanging on by a thread. Truth is perpetually on trial. And for some of us freedom seems like a promise for a few and a rapidly diminishing reality for others. We feel like whatever we do won't change anything anyway.

It is in the midst of all of this Jesus tells us to go. To leave the safety of what we know and enter into the work of God. As God's hands and voice. We cannot help but to be on our way. From this point we have washed up on countless shores. Led into both familiar and unfamiliar villages and cities. Like the folks from Grace who are in Slovakia today.

In Christ we have all we need for our travels. No need to bring anything. We belong to God. You are never alone. God is your defense. We have been forgiven. We no longer need to hang on to our life with white knuckled security.

Our future is in God who has gone ahead of us into every place we might spend wonder. Our destination is fixed. And we have the promise of a savior and companion and the assurance of life beyond every death.

We are saved by sheer grace. Nothing else. Grace that frees us from every shackle of sin, complacency and fear of rejection. Grace that is dynamic and generative. That flows fiercely.

Grace that is not stagnant but has power. By that grace you have been saved and set free to cooperate in God's liberating labor, as my professor put it. The motherly care of God will shelter as we move.

We go and preach, heal, cast out demons, and bring a peace that is strong and cruciform. Peace that is clear eyed, real, and honest Speaking lamb-like lines that drown out the cries of the wolves that we know well.

Going from house to house. One relationship at a time. Living with open-hearted courage in a world of slammed doors. With child-like trust we risk receiving the hospitality of strangers, share meals with others, care for our neighbors, and put down roots right where we are. Speak truth in Jesus name, advocate for justice for his sake. Listen deeply. And find our way to those who cannot go anymore, bring the reign of God to them. On the road we will die to ourselves and rise with Christ a million times. That's our water washed life. And the reign of God will come near.

What villages have you found yourself in, able to bring welcome to those in need of an embrace? Who has given you a word of peace? What stranger has brought you food for the journey? Who has spoken the gospel in just the key that made your soul sing?

Sometimes you have to go. But we never go alone. We are the body of Christ on the way. Headed towards life that lasts. Hearts packed with everything we need.