

The Second Sunday of Pentecost  
 A Sermon preached by  
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“Elephant Rope”

**A**gentleman was walking through an elephant camp, and he spotted that the elephants weren't being kept in cages or held by the use of chains. All that was holding them back from escaping the camp was a small piece of rope tied to one of their legs.

As the man gazed upon the elephants, he was completely confused as to why the elephants didn't just use their strength to break the rope and escape the camp. They could easily have done so, but instead, they didn't try to at all.

Curious and wanting to know the answer, he asked a trainer nearby why the elephants were just standing there and never tried to escape.

The trainer replied;

“when they are very young and much smaller, we use the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free.”

The only reason that the elephants weren't breaking free and escaping from the camp was that over time they adopted the belief that it just wasn't possible.

Sometimes the thought of failure holds us back. Many people have failed but persevered. Bill Gate's first business failed; Albert Einstein didn't speak until he was four years old. Stephen King's first novel was rejected thirty times. Rapper Jay-Z couldn't get signed to any record labels, and Vincent Van Gogh only sold one painting in his lifetime.

**O**ften obstacles or circumstance hold us back from pushing forward, particularly in times of social change. Tear gas, military, and fear of violence are holding many back from protesting against racism. Nevertheless, we persist.

There is a real lack of leadership in the world right now, particularly in the United States. Instead of governments putting resources towards anti-racism programmes that encourage education and change, celebrities and athletes like Michael Jordan are stepping up, with his \$100 million contribution to initiatives for social justice.

In our readings for today, Moses tells the Israelites that they are called to be a priestly kingdom and a holy people. Jesus sends out the disciples as labourers into the harvest. This isn't easy work. The Israelites' election to the priesthood as a “holy nation” creates for them a distinctiveness that carries significant responsibility. Because let's be real, they are to obey the word of God and keep a covenant. Moses is portrayed as this righteous leader who, in our Sunday school stories, is depicted as a strong man, coming down from the mountain. But if we

look at the Exodus text, we soon realize that Moses was criticized by many for leading them into the uncertain wilderness of Sinai. Even when God says, “if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.

If we collectively act as Christians, I believe we can be one part of the solution. We can take comfort that as a people who seek to be holy, we are instilled with *ruah*, the Holy Spirit. This *ruah*, which moves and promises liberation to the endangered can be life giving.

**S**ociety seems to gravitate to freedom in terms of self-preservation or justification. But how often are we tapping into the Holy Spirit to bring about radical change? How often are we using our trauma to produce a significant action that encourages leadership? You see, the system isn’t broken. The system is how it was built. Jesus talked about a new system, a method of equality and justice. But he didn’t do it by himself. No, he sends his baptized friends into the world to proclaim the kingdom of God, to cure the disease of the world—and aren’t we feeling dis-ease because of certain actions? I think in this era of COVID, as we wipe down our homes with sanitizers, we should also take a moment to wipe our own hearts.

Jesus is wise because he noticed things. Today he would notice that what is happening in the world right now isn’t working. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” And then, in recognizing the oppressed, Jesus sent his community out to make the change. He sent Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bart, Thomas, Matthew, John, Thaddaeus, Simon, and even dear Judas. And he also told them that this journey, this adverse path isn’t going to be fun. My friends, you might enter places in this world where you will not be invited nor listened too. You might enter Lafayette Square in Washington DC and see someone holding up a Bible in my name. But, “As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.”

Living in the shadow of Jesus isn’t easy, nor cool sometimes. It can create adversity and division for some. It’s tough sometimes to connect with folks who have faith and those who don’t; or even with people of different viewpoints and interpretations. But through scripture, Jesus provides us with examples of how to love one another. So, what might be our baptismal tools? Could our baptismal covenant be a place to start? What about the Five Marks of Mission?

**T**he disciples didn’t worry about supplies, they had faith. At first, they were worried about leaving everything behind. But put those things away. What are the things that are holding us back from speaking out and making our views known? Are we listening to the Apostle Paul when he says, “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” Can we live boldly with this peace? As an imperfect people, are we ready to serve Jesus, to help the suffering, and our endangered world in the name of the cross?

I hope we aren’t conditioned like the elephants and that our perceptions are holding us back. I hope that our faith will help us move forward as we seek justice, love, and mercy.

AMEN.