

Hitting the Road

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion
on Scholarship Sunday

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC

June 3, 2018

Text: Mark 6:7-13

Graduation season is upon us, as this Scholarship Sunday reminds us so vividly. One of our scholarship recipients is graduating high school this year – Congratulations JB! Another graduated from CCRI and is continuing her studies at URI – Congratulations Lindsay! And the third is enjoying a summer abroad experience as she heads into her senior year at college this fall – Congratulations Brooke in absentia! So, literally and figuratively, our scholarship recipients this year – and every year, really – are hitting the road to the next part of their lives. And that's as it should be. Life goes on, always, whether we're ready for it to move on or not. Our task is to do our best, with God's help, to move forward with it, hearts and minds open to God's plans for us as the days, months and years unfold.

As we know and have most likely experienced, graduations are a time in your life when people just love to give you advice of one kind or another. In greeting cards, in congratulatory toasts (with non-adult beverages of course), over celebratory meals and even in whispered conversations during walks on the beach. Graduations and advice just go together, like it or not. The text we read this morning is, I think, the closest Jesus comes to giving

some graduation advice to the disciples. But before we get to Jesus' advice, I would like to ask the folks here this morning, the folks from your church family, what advice they would give you as you head out into the next chapter of your life. Seriously, what advice do you have for these amazing young people or anyone embarking on a new adventure? *[pause and respond as warranted]*

Okay then! Some wonderful words of wisdom there! But now back to Jesus and his words of wisdom to the disciples as we read them just a few minutes ago from the Gospel of Mark. To put this story in context, Jesus is sending the disciples out on their own to practice what he has been teaching them in terms of sharing the good news of God's love for the people. He knows they are not enthusiastic about this, fearful of failing or disappointing him somehow. He knows they are anxious about what they should take, where they should go, what they should do when they get there. So, as Jesus always does, he makes it very simple for them with some very specific instructions.

First, before he even decides they are ready to leave the nest, so to speak, he knows he's taught them well. He's loved them in spite of all the reasons not to and he lets them know, in no uncertain terms, that he believes they will succeed in what he is sending them out to do. We know this because he "gives them authority" to do what he is sending them out to do. "You got this,"

he's saying to them. "I know you can do this, or I wouldn't be sending you."

Then he helps them with the whole packing issue, the whole "what should I take with me on this journey I'm so nervous about" conundrum. Take nothing, he says. Short and sweet. Just the clothes you are wearing will be sufficient for your needs, he says. Oh, and take sandals. Be sure and take sandals. The days will be long and the roads difficult to walk. Take sandals. Good ones, to preserve your feet for the long journey ahead. What Jesus is saying here at its core is, don't get hung up on stuff as you are beginning a new chapter in your life. Focus on where you are going, putting all your energy in that. Leave the past, and all the stuff that goes with it, in the past. Easier said than done, surely.

His next piece of advice for hitting the road is a little more curious. "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave." Well, duh, we think. What else would you do but stay someplace until you leave? What he's saying here, is something more. He's saying to give wherever you are, and especially the people you are with in the moment, your full attention. Be fully present with them in the moment. Don't be thinking about the next steps in your journey. Don't be dwelling on past problems or future worries. Be fully present in each moment for as long as it lasts. More difficult to do that you might think.

I love the next piece of advice which seems especially appropriate for young folks starting out but, really, when you think about it, this advice is important for everyone to heed. And it's pretty simple. If where you are, this moment you are fully present in, suddenly feels unsafe – like someplace you shouldn't be because you're just getting a really bad vibe – then leave. Immediately. “Shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony” and get out of there, Jesus says. Don't worry about being rude. Don't worry about what people might think. Don't worry about anything but what your gut is increasingly telling you is a bad, even dangerous, situation and get out. Call someone for a ride. Uber, Lyft, a friend, or God forbid, a parent or sibling. If your gut is telling you a situation you are in is heading to a bad place, trust your instincts and do what you need to do to be safe. God gave you those instincts for a reason. Use them. Trust them. It just might save your life. No joke. No exaggeration.

So, this is where Jesus' advice to the disciples ends. Well, almost. The biggest lesson Jesus trusted them to hold on to as the foundation of their lives is implied in all these other bits of sage advice. Jesus is saying this with every individual instruction and trusting that the disciples know it so well he doesn't need to remind them. What is it? Trust that God loves you unconditionally, that God wants the best for you and that God expects the best from you. Trust God and act like you do and life,

your life, will always be a success. Does this mean you will have riches and fame and success beyond your wildest dreams? Maybe. Maybe not. Because God measures success only by how well and how often you love. The love you give is the love that comes back to you. And the funny thing about love is that when you give it away with all your heart and soul, trusting God and living life as God guides you, then love comes back to you a hundredfold.

In these words from Mark's Gospel, Jesus is really telling us about success, what it is and what it isn't. He's saying success is never measured by money or stuff or fame or power. Success is sometimes accompanied by these things, but more often than not, it isn't. Success is what happens when a life, your life, is lived well, grounded in God's love for you, God's faith in you which knows no bounds. So, you might be thinking, if success isn't measured by money or stuff or fame or power, how will I know if I'm successful?? Good question with a simple answer. You'll know. You'll just know. And so will God. Amen.