



Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has warned us that his favorite word is Go! He's referring to the Great Commission, Matthew chapter 28, beginning at verse 19:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember that I am with you always, to the end of the age.

In order to Go, though, you first have to have come. Before you can fulfill the Great Commission you must have gathered and been taught by Jesus. And then we can go resting in the knowledge that Jesus is with us to the end of

the age. We can also go resting in the knowledge that, as Eucharistic Prayer C, prays:

Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name (BCP 372).

The end of the Revelation to John would have us gather together to receive the grace of God so that we may go forth into the beloved community. We are reminded of Jesus' promises to his disciples when John writes that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. There is no where we can go where Jesus is not there first.

Jesus repeats the command to "come" and we respond, "Come, Lord Jesus." The vision of God is that we all are one; we all are gathered together to praise God secure in God's grace and love, forever and ever.

The need to gather, to be together, as one body of Christ, is one of the reasons, I hope, that you come to church on Sunday morning. This is our community, set aside for an hour or so, to reflect, to sing, to pray, and to be refreshed. And then, we are dismissed to go out into the world as disciples. We are commissioned to teach others, through our words and our lives, what difference it makes to us that we believe that Jesus Christ died, was resurrected and will come again. In the words of a hymn often sung at Thanksgiving time: "We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing" (Hymnal 433).

Kate Braestrup's book, *Here If You Need Me*, tells of her journey following her husband's sudden, unexpected death. She follows his dream of becoming a minister and ends up finding her own calling as a chaplain to the Maine Warden Service.¹ She works with game wardens, not prison wardens, and her responsibilities are to be present when a search is called because someone is missing.

¹ Kate Braestrup. *Here If You Need Me* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007).

Acts 16: 16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17: 20-26

Little Allison is with her parents, up from Massachusetts when she goes missing. The Wardens are called and so is Rev. Kate. Kate sits with the parents while the Wardens, the dogs and other volunteers begin searching. The father asks Rev. Kate for the truth: Do you think she's dead? You can tell me the truth, he says. I'm an engineer, I work with statistics, I can take it.

Rev. Kate knows that not every missing person is found alive but many are. She had asked Lt. Trisdale for his opinion before she went to talk to the parents. His response:

I'll tell you what, your Reverendship... I think she's still okay, to be honest with you. It not like the kid was retarded or suicidal or something. She's just good and lost. Those words have been cut over so many times that there's plenty of scrub and low growth to keep her hidden from us. Hell, you'd practically have to step on someone to find 'em in there. She's probably scared of the voices she hears, if she hears 'em at all. Ronnie Dunham's bringing his dog Grace up this evening, and Grace'll have a fresh nose. Fritz stopped and gave it another thought but came to the same conclusion. Yeah... I think we're going to find her (p.12-13).

And so it was. Little Allison was found at 3a.m., curled up under some brush. She was awakened by the cold nose of Grace. The little girl comes walking out of the forest at 3am holding the hand of Warden Ronnie with Grace by her side. And the parents and all who had been part of the search rejoiced.

Jesus rejoices whenever the one lost sheep is returned to the fold. Jesus rejoices when the demons are cast out of the body and the person is returned to health and a place in the community. Jesus rejoices when Lazarus steps forth from the grave. Jesus rejoices anytime any of us are able to live a life that is centered on what he has taught and when we live that life in our community so that others may come to believe.

Sometimes we are called to remain in a situation that has us praying to be released. Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel in Philippi of Macedonia when they came across a slave-girl who had the gift of fortune-telling. She was a useful asset for her owners and earned them money- much like in old-time circuses where the "freaks" earned circus owners money as people came and stared. This girl, though, recognized that Paul and Silas were sent from God and proclaimed a way of salvation. Paul, very much annoyed, ordered the spirit to come out from her and it did.

And then the owners were mad because their income stream had just been cut off. And, so the owners complain to the authorities and Paul and Silas end up in jail, with their feet in stocks. So Paul and Silas, perhaps to keep their spirits up, start singing and praying and then there is an earthquake and all of the chains were unfastened. And not just the chains of Paul and Silas but the chains of all the prisoners.

Do Paul and Silas leave? No, they stay where they are so when the jailer comes, frightened for his life because he assumed all the prisoners had escaped, Paul and Silas can calm him and ultimately lead him to Jesus. The jailer and his entire family are baptized and the entire household rejoices that the jailer had become a believer in God.

Acts 16: 16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17: 20-26

The readings today all include strands of being lost and being found. And when found of rejoicing in the love and grace of God. They are reminders of how we function best when we are part of a community and how our communities may change over time. Even as people join or people leave our communities, the love and grace of God remains constant.

The reading from the Gospel according to John this morning takes place just before Jesus is betrayed and arrested. Jesus still takes time to pray for his disciples – those then and us now – that we may believe, that we will be one, and that the love which God showed to us in Jesus may be made known by us to all with whom we come into contact.

God has not left us comfortless but rather has sent the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. We may have days or times when we wander off like Allison did. We get lost in the woods. In the best of the communities whose focus is on Jesus Christ, there is a Warden Ronnie and a dog Grace that will be looking for us, even at 3 a.m.

Rev. Kate tells of her children asking why their father died. Drew Braestrup was a Maine State Trooper and was killed when someone t-boned his car. She told them:

It was an accident. There are small accidents, like knocking over your milk at the dinner table. And there are large accidents, like the one your Dad was in. No one meant it to happen. It just happened. And his body was too badly damaged in the accident for his soul to stay in it anymore and so he died.

God does not spill milk. God did not bash the truck into your father's car. Nowhere in scripture does it say 'God is car accident' or 'God is death.' God is justice and kindness, mercy, and always- always, love. So if you want to know where God is in this or in anything, look for love (p. 187).

Whatever God is calling you to be and to do, rejoice that God loves us and is with us even to the end of the age. **Amen.**