

**"WHOEVER FINDS THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE IT,  
AND WHOEVER LOSES THEIR LIFE FOR MY SAKE WILL FIND IT."  
MATTHEW 10:39**

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – 6.21.2020

Proper 7 / A

***"Great Bear, Great Wolf, Little Mouse, and the Call of the Gospel"***

Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 69:8-11,18-20; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

How very appropriate that, in this month that witnesses so many graduations, in today's Gospel, we hear the tail-end of a commencement speech, of sorts. Jesus is preparing his twelve closest followers for their first mission apart from him. Having been with him for quite some time, hearing his teaching and preaching, observing his interactions with both the religious authorities and the common people, witnessing his miracles and healings, the disciples have learned and absorbed much from their teacher. Now, having been groomed and prepared, they are graduating, ready to take on responsibilities themselves. They are to leave their families and friends, leave all that is familiar and comfortable, and go out into the world to demonstrate what God's Kingdom looks like, interrupting life-as-they-knew-it with their own opportunities and possibilities for healing, wholeness, truth-telling, repairing relationships, and calling others to follow Jesus.

Earlier in this tenth chapter of Matthew, Jesus empowers the twelve to do all the things he has done: cast out demons, heal people with every kind of sickness, teach about God's ways and the heavenly Kingdom to come. It is a small miracle that Jesus trusts them with such spiritual authority so soon, with their rather limited – and indeed, sometimes faulty – understanding of who he really is. This miracle of Jesus' confidence in his twelve bumbling disciples offers us hope. For we, too, struggle to comprehend Jesus' power – to "keep the faith; keep our eyes on the prize," as Presiding Bishop Curry frequently reminds us – yet we too are sent out anyway to proclaim the Good News amid daily life.

As I said, this morning's Gospel passage is the second half of the commencement address. The entirety of this tenth chapter of Matthew is devoted to the topic of discipleship. Last week, in the first half of Jesus' graduation speech, Jesus advised his new recruits not to take an extra tunic, or sandals, or carry a bag. They are to travel light, without money, relying totally on the good will of the people among whom they are sent and the providence of God to care for them. They are to leave the peace of their own homes in order to bring the message and promise of God's peace to others.

This week, we learn of the response to answering the Lord's call to follow in his footsteps. Maligned and persecuted; fear and denial; perhaps even death awaits as they travel the path set before them. And for some in their number, this is not an exaggeration or idle threat.

Last week, he told his followers: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves . . ."

This week, the harsh words and warnings continue: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. . . . whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

What a job description! Does Jesus really think he will inspire confidence and gather followers with advice like that? Sacrifice? Forsaking all comforts? Giving totally of one's self – even unto death? Who would sign up for such a life? Why should we answer this call? Why would we volunteer for all this?

Because all this – and more – has already been done for us.

This morning, I ask you to step outside our own culture and familiar stories and enter into another culture and hear one of their stories in an effort to see the truth of the Gospel from another perspective, gaining more clarity in the process.

From the Lakota Native American tradition comes this parable, titled “The Legend of Jumping Mouse”. So, sit back, get comfortable, and let me tell you a story . . .

They say that, a long time ago, one day the Great Wolf and the Great Bear were standing all alone and crying. In their sadness, loneliness and pain, they had lost their eyes and were blind. And as the Great Wolf and Great Bear were crying, their Little Mouse brother came upon them. Now, Little Mouse was very tiny, but, filled with pity, he asked his much larger brothers, Great Wolf and Great Bear: ‘Why is it that you cry?’ And, through their tears, they answered: ‘In our sadness, and our loneliness, and pain, we have lost our eyes; and now, we are blind.’

Without taking even a moment to think, because of his love for his brothers, Little Mouse took his own eyes out and, holding them up in his own tiny hands, offered them to Great Bear. But Great Bear snarled, ‘What will I do with these? Can you not see how great I am? Of what good can your tiny eyes be to me?’

Little Mouse then turned to Great Wolf. And Great Wolf took the eyes from Little Mouse’s raised hands and put them where his old eyes had been. At once, he began to feel powerful because he could see once again. He looked down and said, his great tears starting to flow once more: ‘Little Mouse brother, why did you give me your own eyes?’

And Little Mouse said: ‘I realize that before all the universe and before the Great Spirit who created me, I am very humble, and I have always been taught to give my very best to my brothers and sisters.’ Great Wolf began to weep even harder for the selfless gift of his Little Mouse brother.

In his tears, though, he could still remember a great truth. He remembered that there was a sacred lake where anyone could make offerings to the Great Three: The Creator, The Four Directions, and Mother Earth. So, he took his Little Mouse brother by the hand, and Great Wolf and Little Mouse began their long journey. Finally, one day, when it seemed that they could not go another step, when they had been through many sufferings and problems, they came to the top of a mountain, and Great Wolf looked below and saw the most beautiful lake he had ever seen. He looked at the beautiful lake, and then looked down at his Little Mouse brother, and said: 'Oh, Little Mouse, if only you could see the beauty of the lake below us. We have finally come to the end of our journey.'

And he took Little Mouse brother by the hand, and they walked down to the edge of the lake, where the cool waters were lapping against the shore. There, Great Wolf called upon the powers of the universe, upon the Eagle People, upon the Hawk People and the Thunderbird People; and he offered tobacco to all the powers of the sky. Then he called upon the powers of the Great Three. He called first upon The Four Directions: facing west, he prayed to the power of the West, from where come darkness and other great powers; then turning, he called out to the North, from which come the white snows; he turned to face the East, from which comes the red sunrise; and finally, the South, where the yellow deserts lie. He then called to The Creator of all things. Finally, he called upon the powers of Mother Earth to help his Little Mouse brother.

Then he said to Little Mouse: 'The Great Creator, the Great Spirit, speaks to each one of us in our own way, and in our own time. So now, I am going to leave you alone.' They hugged each other, and they cried because they knew they would not see each other for a long while.

Great Wolf went on his way. And Little Mouse, all alone, stood by the edge of the lake; when suddenly Little Mouse heard a voice. 'Little

Mouse, brother, jump.' So, he jumped. 'Jump higher.' He jumped higher. 'Jump higher.' And he jumped even higher. 'JUMP HIGHER!' And he jumped higher than he had ever jumped before, until Little Mouse felt like he was floating in the air.

The voice then said, 'Little Mouse brother, because you gave your very best to your brothers and sisters, because you humbled yourself before all creation, from now and evermore you will no longer be Little Mouse, but from now and evermore you will be the Great Eagle that will fly high above, protecting all the people.

Sacrifice. Forsaking all comforts. Giving totally of one's self.

Why would we do all this? Because all this – and more – has already been done for us.

Let us then have the courage to go out like sheep amidst wolves.

Let us carry our cross and follow Jesus.

Let us lay claim to the promise in Jesus' words: that 'those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

It is true that our sacrifices will not always be appreciated, for there will always be some Great Bear.

But let us exhibit the Christ-like compassion of Little Mouse.

And like Great Wolf, let us recognize and give thanks when, through the loving kindness of others, Christ is revealed in our midst.

Amen.