

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Canon James G. Callaway Sermon Transcript**

Seeing the Kingdom in Believers' Eyes

"If you ever wish the disciples had more backbone, here it is." Preaching exactly fifty years since his ordination, the Rev. Canon James G. Callaway reflects on how today's reading is "a perfect parable for the Christian life." When Jesus leaves detailed instructions for the disciples' first journey, he focuses not on what they should take, but rather what not to take with them. "He ordered them to take nothing except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in their belts." It is in these moments, Father Jamie reminds us, when "we leave our duffle bags behind" that we too can begin to understand that God's grace alone is sufficient. The readings are 2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12:2–10 and Mark 6:1–13.

Sermon Transcript:

We seek to be in your presence, to be your friend, guide us by your Spirit and keep us in your kingdom. Amen.

He ordered them to take nothing for their journey. Well, 50 years ago I was ordained and it was a tumultuous time. My three years at General Seminary had been punctuated by the assassination first of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior and shortly afterwards, Senator Robert F. Kennedy. It was the era of the Vietnam War and the Kent State killings. Upon graduation from seminary, I became a probation officer in the New York courts and joined an intern program in West Harlem. In that context, on July 1, 1971 on a hot and sticky night, I was ordained at St. Mary's Manhattanville by Bishop Paul Moore. What we know was the Episcopal Church today was beaten out over these years on the anvil of three particular encounters. The first was the Civil Rights Movement that challenge segregation than the law of much of the land. The icon of this era was Jonathan Daniels, a seminarian, who was shot in Selma, shielding a 17 year-old black girl who was the intended target, Ruby Sales. The church is and always should be in the middle of these conflicts. Put simply, the church is a conservative institution that holds a radical message. Or in the words of St. Paul, we have an inestimable treasure that we hold in clay pots.

Well, it certainly wasn't the last skirmish, formal segregation fell in the land. Second was women's ministry. When married Shelton was growing up, women could not serve on a vestry or for that matter, even acolyte. Again, Episcopalians rose to the challenge and slowly but surely accepted the ministry of ordained women ahead of most of the world as our own Westina Matthews demonstrates in her new book, *The Band of Sisterhood*, with the story of the first five black women bishops, including our own, Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows. Third was recognizing gays in the ministry starting with the consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. His father met, detailed last week on Pride Sunday, while it isn't over yet, Episcopalians have again led the way. On Trinity's behalf, I heard questions and comments about all of these things constantly in conversations over 30 years in our partnership with the church in Africa.

As grant makers, while we were always clear with who we were, our partners never had to agree with us in order to be supported. Not only did the Episcopal Church change, but it has witnessed to social justice in the world. In 1982, Father John Palmer invited me to take on building a confirmation component to the discovery program, which led to over 25 teams offering commitment to discipleship, an intense Easter season preparing for making a mature commitment of faith. I see some of you graduates who are here this morning. Everyone of the hundreds were precious journeys that I was privileged to share. This all shaped and mirrored my own fundamental shift over the years from understanding the priestly role for which I had been carefully trained, from teaching to rather seeing it as formation. I learned that I had the most to give as a pastor, not with answers, but from listening intently and responding by asking spiritual questions. The shift from giving answers to asking questions. I came to see the answers by God's grace came to believers themselves, which my role, when asked, was to facilitate. But less we linger here, an anniversary of ordination is not about the priest, but about the ministry.

At a church burial, the corpse of a lay person is brought in with his or her feet facing East. Now there are some churches that are turned around, but even in a church that doesn't face East, the head of a church is liturgically East. The premise there is that the deceased is brought in facing East, which is the direction of the parousia or the Lord's second coming that we are eagerly waiting for. But if the corpse is a priest, the position is reversed. The head being toward the altar. Well, while this is a fine point, which we'll leave to Scott Smith, there is a fundamental reason as a priest is ordained to minister, he or she will not see the parousia directly. But rather, looking the other direction, will see it in the eyes of his or her flock. This morning's passage from Mark's Gospel starts with Jesus visit to his hometown, where initial all quickly turns to skepticism of, "Where did this guy get all this from?" This is followed by the descending of the disciples on their first missionary journey. Having followed Jesus so far, now it's time for them to do their part. It's fascinating what Jesus detailed instructions focus on, not what to take with them. Not what to say or to do, but what not to take with them, which is the opposite of what we usually expect and do ourselves.

Did you ever go away to camp or send a kid just that time of year? But usually arrived several weeks beforehand is a detailed list of what to bring. Before too long, there you sit with a foot locker or duffle bag with piles of clothes, some specially bought and either name tags or perhaps today more likely a laundry marker. The camper will be fully equipped and there's a good chance that most of the stuff will come home. Every garment down to the last sock has to have an identifying mark. But Jesus is the opposite. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey, except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts. But to wear sandals, yes and not to put on two tunics, only the clothes on their back. It's scary, taking virtually nothing other than the clothes on your back without even bread, the disciples are going trusting that God will meet all of their needs. If you ever wished the disciples had more backbone, here it is. They did it. Mark's image hearkens back to the Israelites going on the Exodus, where God, despite their fears and anxieties, fed them with manna, bread in the wilderness for a generation, 40 years.

Like the Israelites, the disciples are sent out trusting God to provide. This actually is a perfect parable for the Christian life, either voluntarily through discovery or involuntarily, through tragedy and loss. When we leave our duffle bags behind or they are taken away from us, these are the moments when at the end of our capabilities, we can begin to discover that God's grace is sufficient. Over the years, I've been privileged to journey with dozens upon dozens of believers who endured setbacks that knock them off their pins, wiping out virtually everything. Folks who were midlife, who were laid off their work, only to find it impossible to continue in the same field or who over time had to find creative ways of reinvention, often for pennies on the dollar. Folks in health crises, where the illness or events that made

them invalids for some period of time or more, or folks who suffered the death of a marriage or a precious loved one, they couldn't live without. Now to put this in perspective, my late mother-in-law had a saying. She said, "If you don't like your picture, wait five years". You can look at a picture and say it's not perfect. If you don't like your picture, wait five years. While these crises were intense, usually with hardships not given to immediate solution, the picture five years later was always quite different when the focus had shifted from what was lost to what was discovered.

As a priest, seeing the kingdom in believers eyes has been an incredible gift. We can voluntarily choose to take these journeys ourselves as the disciples did, trusting in God alone as well. Are there times that you're carrying something that letting go of could let you be more trusting in God? Are there times when you feel beckoned to take on something in the world around you? Are you willing to try it out to either let go or to take on? At the end, whether they bring us in feet first or headfirst, our lives are about becoming the disciples God has called us to be in the world Christ came to redeem. A final word I have learned is from St. Ignatius of Loyola, and the experience of Ignatian retreats. At the end of the spiritual exercises is a prayer he gave retreatants to take home with them for their everyday lives, which expresses Jesus call to let go. Take Lord and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given it to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours. Do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.