



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

Are We Ready to be Apostles?
Second Sunday of Easter
April 11, 2021
The Rev. Paul McLain

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Twenty years ago, a French film named ‘Amelie’ captured the attention and hearts of the world. In one of its many subplots, Amelie’s father becomes a recluse after the death of his wife. He had dreams about traveling around the world, but he never does. After the loss of his wife, the only thing for which he seems to find any energy is to place a garden gnome on top of the outdoor shrine he had built to honor her memory.

One day, the garden gnome comes up missing. And the father starts receiving photographs in the mail showing the garden gnome in New York, Moscow, and all the major cities of the world. He doesn’t know what to make of this and he finally shares the photographs with Amelie. She looks at them and with a sly smile says, ‘Maybe he just wants to see the world.’

In our Gospel passage from John, Jesus’s disciples also seem scared to move forward after what seemed a very unholy week to them. They are hiding out in a locked room. And the resurrected Jesus miraculously joins them. He offers them peace and shows them the marks in his hands and his side. Then Jesus commissions them. He does this in the tone of family. He says, ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And then he does something even more intimate – he breathes the Holy Spirit into them.

This marks a major turning point in the Gospel story. The disciples have now become apostles. The word apostle means ‘one who is sent.’ They now have a mission to go out and they are even given the power to forgive sins. But much like Amelie’s father, they seem reluctant to go out into the world. They meet again in the shut-up room a week later.

This time Thomas joins them and Jesus again appears in the midst of them. He offers Thomas the chance to put his hands in Jesus’s wounds. And the one we call Doubting Thomas gives the strongest possible confession of Jesus as ‘My Lord and my God!’ But we still have questions about who the disciples are - Are they ready to leave the locked room? Are they ready to be apostles?

One of the things we have learned over the last year is that there are ways we can leave the locked room without leaving it physically. We have found new ways to connect with others through technology, and we have found time to connect through the old ways of long phone calls and handwritten notes.

Conversely, we have learned that there are times when we have left the locked room but remained locked away in our hearts due to callousness, distractions, or fear. The questions for us, as we are beginning to emerge from lockdown, are: Are we ready to leave the locked rooms of our hearts? Are we ready to be apostles?

In a few moments, we will baptize Gaines Jackson Hammond. One of the prayers we will offer for him is this: 'Send him into the world in witness to your love.' That prayer is a reminder to all of us that as we renew our baptismal covenant, we are emerging from the water like Gaines and are called to find our mission out in the world. Gaines will be anointed with chrism oil, blessed by our Bishop on the Tuesday of Holy Week. This baptismal oil can only be blessed by the Bishop as a sign of her connection with Jesus's apostles. Today, Gaines and we enter the realm of apostleship.

We too are being sent out of our locked rooms, perhaps even geographically, but definitely out of the locked rooms of our hearts. We are all being sent into the world to offer forgiveness and to be witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. We are to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. This involves taking the risk of leaving the safety of the locked rooms of our heart and to open ourselves to the vulnerability of caring for others.

In the movie, Amelie's father keeps getting these photographs of his traveling gnome in the mail. He puts them all up on the wall, and you can tell he's becoming a little envious of his gnome. We learn that Amelie is the one who pried the gnome loose from the makeshift memorial and gave it to a flight attendant friend to make and send these photos from all over the world.

At long last, the father goes out to his garden one day and sees that his gnome is back in place atop the memorial. He stares longingly at the gnome. In one of the next scenes, we see him walk out of the gate of his home for the first time in years, with two suitcases in his hands. He hails a cab to take him to the international airport to begin his long dreamed-about journey out into the wider world.

Jesus teaches his disciples and us that the Good News isn't good if it stays in a locked room. Are we ready to go out and share and be the Good News? Are we ready to be apostles? *Amen.*