

Our scripture passage is filled with wonderful lessons today. One of the many things I appreciate about the Bible is that it's a living document. It's not a musty, dusty, crumbling history book. It's an anecdotal and didactic "manual for life", throughout all the ages.

The first lesson we receive is one of radical inclusion. As we learn who is present, we find a man with darker skin from the region of Niger and we find a man who was brought up with Herod. Some commentaries suggest that they were brought up in the same household. That this man (this prophet or teacher) grew up with Herod, the very man who killed John the Baptist is of note. His background and his 'family' would seem to set him apart from this group, but not only does he become a follower of Jesus, but he becomes a leader, bringing others to Christ. Can't you just see the early church saying, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here"...here in this group of people who identify with Jesus. The lesson for us is that we ought not to judge about where someone has been or what they look like. Jesus is for everyone--and everyone can bring others to Christ.

The next thing we observe is that the Holy Spirit prompts us differently. In this passage, some folks are 'set apart' to do God's work in particular ways. Just like the back of our bulletin says, that all the members of the congregation are ministers, but you're not all ordained pastors. You can do God's work in many ways, even if you're not leading worship. Barnabus and Saul heal a man who can't move. They help him get 'unstuck' and be able to 'move forward'. You can do this, too, and help people to heal from physical, emotional, and spiritual affliction—sometimes just by being there and offering a ministry of presence.

One thing of particular interest is that the season we're now in, Eastertide, is the season of the early church. Jesus has been Resurrected and the disciples and early followers are out there on their own, talking about Jesus and sharing the good news with others. In this case, others who haven't heard of Jesus....others who are far away....others who don't even speak the same language. This is where things get a little funny.

Let me put a bookmark here and share a story of something that happened a while ago. I went to Aruba several years ago. The friend I traveled with was fascinated by the Iguanas that were all around our hotel. They were quite big—several feet long and they looked ferocious, even if they did laze around in the sun and then just quietly munch on lettuce leaves. Vinnie took lots of pictures. Actual photos...printed on photo paper and shared not on facebook, by handing them across the table to each other. I mention this because I was showing my family pictures from the trip and my nephew who was only about 3 at the time got wide-eyed.

"Auntie", he exclaimed, "you saw dinosaurs?!?!" I chuckled a bit and I told him that the creatures he was looking at weren't dinosaurs. He then asked if they were dragons.

He was doing what we all do when we observe something. We look in the file drawers we keep in our minds to find something similar. Books, toys, and even bedsheets for children are full of

dinosaurs and even dragons...so that's where he went.

Our early teachers, Saul and Barnabus have gone out into new territory to bring the good news of Jesus to others. They get to Lystra and heal someone so the folks there do something not so different than my young nephew did, they thought back to their experience of gods, and assumed that Saul and Barnabus must be those gods. Barnabus is thought to be Zeus, the king of the Olympian gods and Saul is thought to be Hermes. Hermes was the messenger of the Olympian gods and Saul's gift of gab made him a ringer for Hermes.

Saul and Barnabus see that the people are excited and they think it's because they're excited to hear about Christ. They have no idea that they're being called gods until people want to start sacrificing to them. That's when they say, "we're human just like you". It's God who has all the power. It's God who does all of this. It's God who is all around us. It's significant to the story's location in history (and to us here and now) that there is a period of misunderstanding. In this case, language was a barrier, but God bridges barriers. In this case, tradition was a barrier, but God bridges barriers. Thank God that there is such a thing as neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to change over a lifetime. There is a tremendous amount of misunderstanding about religion and faith and God out there today.

Have I shared the Henry Ford quote with you before? It's one of my favorites. As he was designing the first automobile, he said, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said, "Faster horses"." Horses were what they knew...cars were a new concept, but how much faster and more practical for our needs of getting around today is a car to a horse?

So friends, I'm going to pose an important question to you: People out there know that cars exist, but they don't all necessarily know that God exists. And they don't know about the difference that faith can make in their lives. Each one of us, every single one, can be a messenger just like Saul and Barnabus.

We can go away from a place where everyone knows Jesus (that means *outside* of church) to speak with people and share your own experiences. Church is a place to come and absorb the lessons, then you can let Spirit prompt you and lead out to go and teach others.

We don't often speak of faith. But this is exactly what we're called to do. And particularly in this time of the church year, where Jesus has gone back home and it's up to the people to spread the good news.

On this Mother's Day, we can remember the mothers, grandmothers, godmothers and mother figures who taught us. Did they tell us something once and we instantly 'got it'? Or did they have to show us, tell us, and share with us experiences that taught us about faith and life? Did we have to experience it ourselves and practice it over and over again? (We have to practice it, right? Just like Saul and Baranabus.)

I'd like for us to try something now. For the next 30 seconds, turn to someone nearby and tell

them about your mom, grandmother, aunt, or a mother-figure in your life. After 30 seconds, I'll ask you to switch. (You always have the option to opt out, but I hope you'll do this.) (30 seconds. Switch. 30 seconds.)

Was that fairly easy? Did something pop to mind right away?

Faith isn't a passive activity. It's active and our call isn't so different than the early teachers. You may have noticed that it's not 1968 and we don't have 300 children in our Sunday School program. It may not be so obvious here at First Parish, but it certainly is when you visit a church and there are 25 people inside.

You know that faith matters and you know it makes a difference through the seasons of our lives. Sadly, 8 out of 10 people 'out there' don't know that...and they just don't know what they're missing! So we need to tell them.

Church is a safe place to practice new things, so I'm hoping that you're willing to let yourself be inspired by Spirit. (Of course you have the option to opt-out.)

We just spoke of our moms, now, let's pretend that we're not so different than those folks in the early church and let's take a few minutes to talk about Jesus and the ways you've experienced him in your life. Or you can talk about God or a time when your faith made a difference.

At our Thursday evening worship, we always set aside time to talk about "God sightings" or "God moments" we've recently had. I'd like for you to turn to someone in a pew nearby and for talk for 30 seconds, then I'll invite you to switch. (30 seconds. Switch. 30 seconds.)

I'm hopeful that this tiny little bit of practice will help make it easier for you to talk about faith—in a world that needs it so very much! Blessed be and amen.