

**Sermon for Pentecost 2 Year A 2020**  
**Will You Go Where You Don't Know?**

Etty Hillesum was a young Jewish woman in her twenties when Holland was occupied by Nazi Germany.

She was not a conventionally religious person and yet between the years of 1941 and 1943,

as she watched her world descend into nightmare, she became aware of God's hand on her life.

Imprisoned in the transit camp at Westerbork—

before being shipped to the gas chambers of Auschwitz—

Etty wrote these words:

*There must be someone to live through it all  
and bear witness to the fact that God lived, even in these times.  
And why should I not be that witness?*

In writing about Etty, former Archbishop of Canterbury,

Rowan Williams, describes her commitment this way:

She decided to occupy a certain place in the world,

a place where others could somehow

connect with God through her.

She took responsibility

(and want you to think of this in this way:

response-ability, as in the ability to respond)

for witnessing to believing in God in the world.

Rowan puts it this way:

She took responsibility for making God credible in the world.

Taking responsibility for God's believability.

I've been thinking about these phrases from Rowan's book,

*Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, all week.

How does it make you feel?

*Making God credible in the world.*

*Taking responsibility for God's believability.*

What visceral, immediate reactions—if any—do they trigger?

Are you alarmed?  
Excited?  
Longing?  
Do you feel fear?  
Or, perhaps you feel angry?  
Does it ever occur to us  
that these phrases might describe our vocation as followers of Christ?  
Is it possible that we are called to make belief in the kingdom of God  
credible for the world we live in?  
Does it ever occur to you and me that as the body of Christ on earth,  
we have some responsibility in how others see and experience  
him in our time and place?

I have no doubt that you, like me,  
are reeling from the events  
that have rocked the United States  
over the past weeks and months  
I know I am not alone in lacking words to express the frustration and  
sorrow I feel.  
Once again, we mourn a black man's senseless murder at the hands of  
abuse of police force.  
Once again, we must confront the deep,  
insidious racism that poisons our nation's core.  
Once again, we are called to repent our history,  
grieve with black and brown brothers and sisters,  
and insist on the justice that is now centuries overdue.  
Once again, we are summoned to render  
God's good news credible in a dark hour.

In today's gospel, Jesus commissions his trusted twelve disciples to  
liberate and enliven the "harassed and helpless."  
Seeing the multitudes of "sheep without a shepherd,"  
Jesus is deeply moved, and so he tells his disciples,  
"Go."  
Go and proclaim the good news of the kingdom.

Go and cure the sick, raise the dead,  
cleanse the lepers, and cast our demons.  
Go and touch.  
Go and heal.  
Go and resurrect.  
Go and make peace.

*Go and render believable the compassion of God.*

Wow! I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed.  
But just hang on, Jesus actually has more to say.  
After explaining to the disciples what their task is,  
he offers them some appalling operating instructions:  
*You received without payment; give without payment.*  
*Take no gold or silver or copper in your belts.*  
*Take no bag or two tunics or sandals or staff.*  
And . . . saving the zinger for last:  
*I'm sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves, so be as wise as  
serpents and as innocent as doves.*  
*You will be dragged before governors.*  
*You will be handed over to councils and flogged.*  
*You will be hated by all because of my name.*

Let's see if I have this straight.

Jesus is saying,

- Prioritize those who have nothing. Go to those who have no one to advocate for them, no one to hear them, no one to attend to their needs. Go to the harassed, the mistreated, the oppressed, and the exhausted. Knock on their doors, and place yourselves at their service. Humbly accept their hospitality. Learn the art of dependence. Do not live and minister above or apart from the people you wish to help—live among them. Engage them. And do so deeply.
- Choose poverty, simplicity, and vulnerability. Carry no weapons. Stockpile no resources. Have no back-up. Abandon your egotism.

Do not parade in like a savior, basking in pomp and circumstance. Lead instead with quietness, gentleness, curiosity, and humility. Insofar as it depends on you, keep, make, and share the peace. Remember that power has been give to you for one reason and one reason only—so that you can give it away.

- Don't be foolish. Be wise. Be attentive. LISTEN! Know the complexities of the world in which you move. Make every effort to understand what's happening beneath the surfaces. But be pure of heart, don't revel in ignorance, flatten reality, or mistake naivete for faith. In other words, be *in* the world but not *of* the world.
- When you've done all of the above—in other words, when you get all of this more or less right—expect life to get pretty grim. Know that lots of folks will distrust you. Understand that many well-meaning people will yet and scream at you. Expect rejection, expect to be called out, expect to be wounded and beaten. Don't be surprised when your life gets uncomfortable. This is what success as a disciple looks like.
- Do not despair. You are not alone. The Spirit of God—my Spirit—is with you, and the Spirit will give you the words you need and the courage you lack. Remember, grace abounds, so don't lose heart. The one who endures to the end will be saved.

Are you scared now?

Make no mistake, the gospel is confrontation.

The gospel is demanding and grace and love can actually be offensive. Today, Jesus asks us to surrender absolutely everything for the sake of making God's grace and love credible to a world that's convulsing in pain—and he does so without reservation or apology.

His harsh-sounding instructions suggest that there will be times when our faith requires us to violate cultural norms, when faith active in love will have us fighting uphill battles, and speaking dangerous truths to power and even those we dearly love.

If our overriding priority as Christians is to secure our own comfort, then we cannot follow Jesus.

Discipleship will disorient and disrupt us . . . even our families.  
It will make us the neighborhood or family weirdo.  
It will shake things up in our churches and communities.  
It will expose evils in the status quo we cling to.  
It will humble us and bring us to our knees.

As our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans so eloquently puts it:  
*Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.*

So often we Christians try to skip straight to hope  
and hunker down and snuggle in its promise.  
But hope is not the same thing as clueless optimism  
and premature consolation.  
Hope has no meaning if it's not undergirded by justice.  
Notice the sequence that Paul presents:  
suffering (sacrifice), endurance (patience),  
character (integrity or moral fiber), and THEN hope.  
The fact that our salvation is free  
does not mean it comes cheap.

To be the body of Christ in the world is to make God's compassion and  
grace believable here and now.

It means we need to stand in the white-hot center of the world's pain.  
Not just to glance in the general direction of suffering and injustice,  
and then sidle away (shaking our heads and tsk-ing out tongues)  
but to dwell there.

To identify ourselves wholly with those who are aching, weeping, dying.  
In the case of America's longstanding racial crisis,  
making the love of Christ believable means moving beyond denial,  
beyond willful ignorance,  
and beyond the band-aid approach of thoughts and prayers.

It means deciding, as grateful followers of a brown man who died at the  
hands of brutal law enforcement two thousand years ago,  
that will not tolerate the demon, the disease, the virus of racism in our  
midst for one more generation.

Pastor Dante Stewart puts it this way:

*Sympathy feels bad about a situation.*

*Solidarity joins in as a co-worker to change the situation.*

*Sympathy calls for love without risk.*

*Solidarity calls for risk as love.*

*Sympathy centers the comfort and timetable  
of those who benefit from a system of difference.*

*Solidarity calls for a revolution of value in a system in which we build a  
loving just common life together.*

Why does Jesus ask so much of us?

Because he gave us so much.

*You received without payment*

*Now give without payment*

Perhaps if we can put aside our reluctance and our fear,  
we will feel the weight and power  
and dare I even say the *glory* of this calling?

Jesus calls us only to what we were created for.

He knows our brokenness, our malaise, our boredom, our angst—  
our desire for the status quo.

He knows that when we go out into the world in his name,  
healing what is dis-eased and diseased,  
resurrecting what is dead,  
and casting out what is evil,

we participate in the transformation of our own souls.

What we're hearing in these days is the very heart of God within us,  
what one psalmist described as "deep calling to deep,"  
the Spirit crying out on behalf of a world absolutely desperate for  
and in need of justice and mercy and the peace that only Christ can give.

Will we listen?

Will we answer the call? Will we stand in solidarity and bear witness to  
the love of God in Christ in these times, in our places?

Why shouldn't that witness be you and me?