

⁷ And [Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to have been one of those disciples, and other first person witnesses, to Jesus’ preaching, teaching, healing, forgiving, and loving?

Can you imagine what it would be like if Jesus came and stood right here among us – politely inviting me to sit down -- he’d take over the preaching and teaching from here today? And (continuing in this imaginary story) there would be some people who would NOT accept his preaching and teaching.

Can you imagine that Jesus came right into this sanctuary and offered forgiveness of sins and healing to whomever would come and receive? And there would be some people who would NOT accept his forgiveness and healing.

It almost seems impossible to conceive, but it did happen. And if to Jesus, then surely to his disciples. Although Jesus may be accused by some people as having his head in the clouds and not having his feet firmly planted in reality, I have found from my reading and study of the Gospels that Jesus very much understood the realities of life. ***“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”*** he taught. (Matthew 10:16)

Jesus understood what it meant to be rejected, and he knew that if he would be rejected, so, too, would his followers.

And so he had this teaching for them for when it happened. And, I believe that if we look into his wisdom, with open hearts and minds, we are going to see just one more aspect of this POWER of the Kingdom of Heaven that we are midway through examining in this 6 week worship series.

He told them that if, and when, they are rejected by those to whom they go, they are to simply ***“leave [and] shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”***

I used to read this scripture as indicating that if any were foolish enough to not receive and be blessed by the Kingdom of Heaven that is at hand, then the one who brings the refused message and power is to mark them with a BIG

RUBBER STAMP that says something like “STUPID” or “EVIL” or “GO STRAIGHT TO HELL, DO NOT PASS GO, DO NOT COLLECT \$200” or some other words of condemnation – you know like THE MARK OF CAIN – back in the First Testament; the permanent mark on Cain as his punishment for the first homicide in the Bible, for killing his brother.

Check it out: Genesis 4:15 is the place where we learn of “THE MARK OF CAIN.” It was actually a mark of protection by the Lord God, that no one should take vengeance on Cain for his sinfulness; he was – a sinner, yes, but still under the loving care and protection of the Lord God.

So I look at this Gospel lesson for today, and ask what else might it mean, if not a curse on the people who did not believe the purveyors of Jesus’ teaching and power of the Kingdom of Heaven. And then it came to me:

The **testimony of the action of shaking the dust off your feet** is this:

- ***Your rejection of this message does not diminish me.***
- ***Your rejection of me does not diminish me.***
- ***I AM RELEASED FROM THE POWER OF YOUR REJECTION.***

There seems to be a particular bent to “GET ‘EM” – all those who are not of the same mind as we are. If you use FaceBook, you have seen much of this in the past two weeks as people have flamed out at other people who believe differently – and on all sides of the theo-political spectrum. Alas, this is not new to us, as the Gospel of Luke remembers:

⁵¹ When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. ⁵³ But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ***“Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”***⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them, and he said, ***“You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy people’s lives but to save them.”*** (Luke 9:51-55)

Jesus was VERY practical. He knew that there would be rejection. But we should never, never confuse Jesus’ practicality with our default responses. ***Jesus knew all about hard knocks, but he came to show us a different way to deal with them.***

Rather than striking out at the people who reject, Jesus made a liturgical act to get the rejected people to know that THEY ARE RELEASED from the power of that rejection.

RELEASE is one of the strongest tools in the **KINGDOM OF HEAVEN TOOL BOX OF POWER.**

The worship committee met back in May to shape this worship series on the POWER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, but it has been in these past two weeks that I have been focusing on the NEED FOR and STRENGTH of this power called RELEASE.

It seems that I am seeing it everywhere I go. I do not, and will not, use pastoral care or counseling as illustrations for sermons, so don't anyone think that I am preaching about what you have confided in me.

There are folks who will think I am talking about them, in the following, because what I am talking about is so universal in the desperate human condition.

There are SO MANY people who feel like they are CAPTIVE, without RECOURSE, without HOPE, without POWER TO ESCAPE. People who feel like they are on a hamster wheel for which they are doomed to keep running without getting anywhere. It is a feeling of powerlessness and despair.

And in just about every such example, the problem is that people allow other folks to paint them into a corner. Jesus says, "NO! You do NOT have to be a VICTIM. You may choose to be a VICTIM but that's your choice. The Kingdom of Heaven is about RELEASE from Victimhood.

Here's just a simple example. I want you to think of the person – or one of several persons – who somehow manages to "get your goat" (Is that expression still valid today? How about:

- Rub you the wrong way
- Get under your skin
- Drive you up the wall
- Get on your last nerve
- Cause you to want to go and poke knitting needles into your eyeballs

Anyway – know what I mean?

This person who has, over the course of time, built up a default response that you just seem to not be able to control – just to see them coming toward you raises your blood pressure, and puts you on the defensive, as the fight-or-flight-of-adrenaline-chemically charges you.

Here's where the **POWER OF RELEASE** comes in to play.

- HIT THE PAUSE button.
- When you first begin to feel those feelings, HIT THE PAUSE button, and remember:

- You are a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.
- This person really has no power over you – UNLESS you give it to them.
- Before you begin the adrenaline build-up which clouds your ability to do much of anything, other than fight or flight – remember that you are RELEASED by the POWER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Jesus gave the disciples a little LITURGY to do – to cause them to HIT THE PAUSE BUTTON and to remember that their value does not come from the opinion of other people; that their value comes from God, comes from within.

So, too, figure out your own LITURGY to do. You may not find shaking the dust off your feet as socially acceptable in many situations. NOBODY ELSE needs to understand, or even, recognize your liturgy.

You can have any simple liturgical act – any practiced and rehearsed action – that will remind you mind:

- I am beloved
- My worth is not established by this person's opinion
- This person REALLY and ULTIMATELY does not have any lasting power over me.
- I am RELEASED from them, so I might as well act like it.
- I don't have to run nor defend. All I have to do is to look at this person and realize something that they probably don't even understand: I am released from their power.

It is an amazing thing the advantage you will have in any interpersonal conflict situation, when you realize that (a) you have a secret, (b) you know the final outcome – you are NOT going to lose. (c) You are released from the power of the other person.

Your liturgical act might be to scratch your chin, to tug your ear, to touch your right knee – something – the act does not matter so long as you recognize it as your implementation of power that makes you a winner.

THAT is just how powerful the Kingdom of Heaven is.

OK, you may think that I sound as impractical as Jesus was. You may say that this simply won't work in the real world.

I could stand here, or we could sit down over a cup of coffee and have a lively conversation of the practicality of what I am saying. But ultimately – until you begin to USE the power of the Kingdom of Heaven and experience just how strong it is, you will never be able to “talk yourself in or out” of the truth that Jesus spoke:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do ... (John 14:12)

You canNOT experience it by talking about it; you have to do it, any more than you can experience the power of prayer, by simply talking about it.

- Gently
- Healing

These have been the keywords of the Power of the Kingdom of Heaven the past two weeks. I know that my daily giving and receiving of these reminders to/from others has been helpful for me to remember and to utilize these heavenly powers. I encourage you this week to practice RELEASE. Know this power, by experiencing it.

Or you may choose to not. That's OK. I am released from anyone's unwillingness in this moment to try it, as being something that diminishes me. But, if you do choose to try it, I believe that you will come to know just one more piece of what Jesus' ministry was all about, so that we may know the Kingdom of Heaven which is AT HAND, which is the path for life – abundant and eternal.

So mote it be, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.