

Trust Walks **September 3, 2023**

Before I went to seminary and became a priest, I worked odd jobs for a couple years. One of my favorite gigs was leading teambuilding activities. I worked at a corporate retreat center outside of Buffalo, New York. Companies would organize retreats for their employees, and they would come and stay at this center for a few days. It was a nice place – there was a pool, an exercise room, a bar, meeting rooms, and all sorts of amenities.

And one of my roles there was to facilitate teambuilding sessions. So I would meet with an employer, and they would say, “We’re struggling with an ongoing conflict in our workplace,” or “We have a couple cliques in our office, and we need to forge new relationships outside of those cliques.” Whatever the case may be. And it was my job to lead activities and hold conversations that addressed those issues in a non-threatening way.

One of the most effective activities we did was a trust walk. I would place people in groups of 2 or 3, and one person would be blindfolded. Their partner(s) would then guide them as they played a game of “Follow the Leader,” following me through the woods, sometimes over obstacles, maybe into a building. Sometimes the sighted people could touch their partners; sometimes they could only guide with voice commands.

If you’ve never done a trust walk, it’s unnerving. We depend so much on our sense of sight, that it can be anywhere from uncomfortable to downright terrifying to walk for a quarter of a mile blindfolded. In fact, in my experience, the people who struggle with trust walks the most are men who are physically fit, who are strongest and most athletic. It’s hard for them (and everyone, really) to be wholly reliant on someone other than themselves.

It’s one thing to know that you’re supposed to follow someone; it’s another to actually do it, especially when you can’t see where you’re going.

We like to be able to see where we are going.

Unfortunately, that is not always possible. Take Moses, for example. We hear about this amazing display of God’s power, the burning bush that is not consumed. Moses approaches the bush, taking off his sandals because of the sacredness even of the ground where he walks.

Then God tells Moses to go down to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery to freedom. It’s a huge honor, to be the leader, ordained by God. But Moses objects. “Who am I, that I should be the one to go down to Egypt and free the Israelites? And what if they ask who sent me?”

And then our reading ends but Moses’ objections continue. “What if people don’t believe me? I can’t speak well. Why don’t you send someone else?” Finally, God gets ticked off and says, “Go! I’ll send your brother Aaron to help you, but go!”

One big trust walk. It’s one thing to know that you’re supposed to follow; it’s another to actually do it, especially when you can’t see where you’re going.

We hear a similar story in the Gospel. Peter, the keeper of the keys of heaven, has just proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah. But then when Jesus starts to explain what he has to do as the Messiah, that he will be arrested and killed, Peter objects.

“God forbid it, Teacher! This must never happen to you!” You’re the Messiah! You’re the one who has to lead the rebellion against the Romans, kick them out, and reclaim our homeland! If you’re going to die in Jerusalem, then just don’t go!

Jesus’ response is interesting. “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” Now Satan has shown up in Jesus’ ministry once before. He was the tempter in the wilderness. By calling Peter “Satan,” is Jesus saying that he’s tempted not to go to Jerusalem, to avoid the whole suffering and death? That sure sounds tempting to me.

Then there’s the phrase, “Get behind me!” It’s the same phrase that Jesus uses when he calls his disciples, what we translate as “Follow me.” Jesus isn’t saying to Peter, “Get out of my way,” but rather, “Follow me, Peter, Satan, so that you can see what the Messiah is supposed to do.”

And to follow, you have to pick up your cross. Before a person was crucified, he would be forced to carry the beam of his cross through the streets of the city. And people would mock, jeer, ridicule, spit upon that person. It was humiliating. To pick up your cross and follow Jesus, you have to let go of ego, pride, respectability, and be willing to do what is right.

It’s one thing to know that you’re supposed to follow. It’s another to do it, especially when you can’t see where you’re going.

So the question, the challenge, the invitation that our readings pose to us this week is: *Where is God calling you to go?* What must you do to follow Jesus? What are you drawn to do... even if you are scared to pursue it?

I will say, not everyone is called to be Moses, to leave their whole life and travel to a foreign land. Sometimes we are called to stay, to remain exactly where we are, but to give up those things that we cling to, like pride and status and comfort.

What is God calling you to do or to go? It can be scary to follow, especially when you can’t see the end. But it is what our God and our Lord call us to do.

Amen.