

# Living Sent While Abiding

*By Linda Rex*

**May 22, 2022, 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in EASTER**—Many of those who know my husband Ray and I recall that recently we experienced God asking us if we would “go.” We both affirmed that we would go wherever God intended to send us, but we are still listening for God’s direction as to a specific location. While we are abiding here in the Nashville area currently, we are also living in the reality that we are “sent” by God to participate in his mission in this world.

The reality that each of us as followers of Jesus Christ is called to “go” is hard to reconcile sometimes with the need to continue to live our day to day lives. The “go” Jesus gave every one of us is found in what is often called the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20 NASB).

Notice the double reality of that instruction from Jesus: 1) He told the disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations, and that 2) he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth and would be with them even to the end of the age. Jesus never asks us to do something without equipping us for the task and promising to be with us in the midst of it, empowering us to do it.

Think about the story of Moses, meeting God for the first time at the burning bush. God sent him back to Egypt to deliver his people, but he also instructed him about who he was (the I Am), and equipped him with signs to show God was with him, and he promised to be present in the midst of all that happened. But in order for the people of ancient Israel to be freed, Moses had to take the steps of obedience God had given him, trusting God would be with him and would do what was needed in each moment. It was a walk of faith.

If you look at the story in John 5:1–9, which is the partner gospel passage for this Sunday, you will find Jesus entered the pool at Siloam where a multitude of sick, diseased and lame people lay. He walked up to a man who had laid there paralyzed for thirty-eight years and asked him if he wanted to be well. Why would he ask him such a question? Possibly, this man needed to decide whether or not he really wanted to be well or if he wanted to continue in his hopeless, pathetic state. To want to be well required that he act upon what Jesus said to him next, “Get up, take up your pallet, and walk.”

Inherent within Jesus command lay the power and capacity for the man to do exactly that. But he needed to actually *do* what Jesus told him to do about the situation he was in. When he acted upon Jesus’ command, he discovered that he was able to get up off the ground, bend over to pick up his mat, and to begin walking. What a delightful discovery!

The book of Acts is filled with stories of how the members of the early church would hear a command from Jesus or from the Spirit and would act upon it, thereby bringing about transformation in their spiritual community. An example of this can be found in the first reading for this Sunday, Acts 16:9–15. The apostle Paul and Silas were traveling about on one of their missionary journeys, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. One night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing there, asking him to, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Now if anybody in many churches today had that experience, what would they say? They probably would say, “That was such a weird dream. Maybe I ate too much pizza last night. No, it was the anchovies. I did have one too many glasses of wine before I went to bed, that’s true. Where is Macedonia anyway?” They most certainly would not wake up and say, as Paul and Silas did, “We need to go to Macedonia and share the good news with them.” More than that,

Paul and Silas immediately got on a boat and took a long trip to Macedonia. And having arrived, they looked for and found a group of people gathering for prayer, shared the gospel with them, and a new house church was born.

Do you see the connection between hearing what God says and then acting upon it? The key to our ability to actually do as God asks, though, is the abiding presence of God. The disciples, toward the end of his ministry, were saddened by Jesus constantly teaching that he was going to leave them or die. Jesus told them that if they really loved him, they would be excited that he was leaving, since that meant that afterward the presence of both he and the Father would be in them by the Holy Spirit. God's abiding presence in the Spirit would bring to mind everything Jesus had taught them and would give them a deep understanding they could not otherwise have. By the Spirit they would receive that profound sense of peace Jesus had promised them, and they would be able to do even greater works than Jesus had done while on earth.

Jesus was not asking the disciples to do anything he was not willing to be a part of and present within. He had every intention of abiding with them as they abode in him. It was to be a relationship between their Lord and them that, by the Spirit, not only directed them in where they were to go and what they were to do, but also empowered them to do it as they obeyed his word. Jesus wanted them to keep his word, to preserve and spread his good news message to the world, and live it out by loving God and loving others. They, as we are today, were sent to share with others in every nation, the truth about who our loving God is, what he has done for us and is doing in his Son Jesus Christ, and to be empowered by the Spirit as they did this.

Followers of Jesus Christ are given the same calling today that Jesus gave his disciples. He does not ask us to "go" without being present with us and in us, and does not leave us struggling to figure out what to do next. The testimony of Scripture teaches us that Jesus by the Spirit led the disciples wherever he wanted them to go. As the disciples abode in Christ, everyday activities like traveling on the road, moving to another community due to persecution, and going to the marketplace or temple all became places where Christ was present by the Spirit, and where the good news could be shared with others.

We can do the same thing today as we go about our lives. We can live "sent" by God knowing he is present right now, abiding in us as we abide in him. We can listen attentively to the Spirit and obey his directions to us about people to talk to, deeds of kindness to do, and places to visit. What is he saying to you today? More importantly—will you go do it, knowing Jesus is with you and in you as you "go"?

*Father, thank you for meeting us in the midst of our sickness and paralysis by sending us your Son to tell us to arise, to take up our mat of indifference and complacency, and to walk in love. Grant us the grace to obey your word by your Spirit, and to simply do as you ask, trusting you are in us and with us to the end, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

*"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, "I go away, and I will come to you." If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe.' "* John 14:23–29 NASB