

Christ Church + Washington Parish  
The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli  
Way of Love Series: Go  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 10:1-9

In my first sermon introducing the Way of Love series a few weeks ago, I noted that today's topic "Go" is one of the most difficult spiritual practices. Not necessarily to do – that really depends on your personality, but to understand and describe. Unlike some of the other practices, learn, worship, bless – it isn't part of our everyday language of Christian living. The Way of Love materials summarize Go as – Cross boundaries, listen deeply, live like Jesus. Cross boundaries is the first essential element to Go. You have to cross a line of division in our society and practice gospel living there to really understand Jesus' teachings. Why isn't it enough to live out the values of the faith in circles that look, think, talk like me? Because across a boundary is always where the gospel has been rooted. It is where the reconciling work of God happens.

It isn't unusual to see in a church's mission statement that their hope is to be a part of God's reconciling work in the world or something to that extent. The language comes from this passage in 2 Corinthians: "God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself." Now I was always taught that it was poor writing skills to use variations of the same word multiple times in a sentence. It indicates you don't know other ways to communicate the same thing which means you don't really have a great sense of what you are trying to communicate, so if you have struggled like me to understand what it means to be a part of God's reconciling work in the world, I'm just going to say you shouldn't feel bad.

I'm sure they could mean a lot of things, but I'm going to take a chance with this explanation. Sin separates us from God in the world, and the Incarnation penetrates that separation – by becoming one of us through Jesus, God is no longer separate from the human, and it is that nearness that provides the opportunities for healing and renewal. The interwovenness of the divine and human is what allows for reconciliation. **You can't reconcile with what you are separate from, so nearness, nearness is a must.** When Jesus preached and healed, he was always crossing lines of social division – gender, ethnicity, class, religion even – it is crossing these lines that the vision and truth of God's love and redemption being for all people truly took root. To join with the reconciling work of Christ, we too have to cross lines of separation and get near to people, near to people who are different than you. Jesuit priest Greg Boyle who has written and spoken frequently about his decades of work with current and former gang members through his nonprofit, Homeboy Industries, opened one of his books by saying, "Living the gospel is less about thinking outside the box than choosing to live in this ever-widening circle of inclusion."<sup>1</sup> To live in the ever-widening circle of inclusion that Jesus proclaims, we have to move through the separation among us.

About ten years ago, Bill Bishop wrote *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*. As part of his research he looked at voting records, IRS income figures, patent filings, poll numbers from advertising firms to figure out how thoroughly and in what ways, Americans had sorted themselves. Their conclusion: "By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seemed as though the country was separating in every way conceivable."<sup>2</sup> We have managed to

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<sup>1</sup> Boyle, Gregory. *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/books/review/Stossel-t.html>

separate ourselves, statistically-speaking by race, class, political viewpoint, education level, and on and on. Now in diverse and cosmopolitan DC, we may sometimes feel a little righteous about the lack of separation in our lives – walk a few blocks down Pennsylvania Avenue you’ll walk by people who cross all kinds of divisions in race, class, politics, education, mental health and so on. But how often do those people do more than exchange greetings? We may be less physically divided than many areas of the country in DC, but there are plenty of lines of division in our default comfort zones.

The gospel text today says that Jesus sent the disciples out all over – far beyond their comfort zones. Note what he tells them to do there. He doesn’t tell them to quote Bible verses or tell them how awesome Jesus is or tell them what they are doing wrong– he tells them to wish them peace, to sit at table with them and receive the hospitality they offer, to heal, and to tell them “the kingdom of God has come near” – which is a quick way of saying, tell them that you see God among them.

When you cross a line of difference, you are not just bringing something; in fact, you aren’t even primarily bringing something; you are receiving something. Jesus intuitively gets that how you receive someone is going to have a lot to do with how someone receives you. The relationship that Jesus paints is one of mutuality, where what you open yourself to receiving comes **before** your ability to offer anyone anything. Good-hearted people, Christians and non-Christians, have done all kind of damage when they have crossed lines of difference – cultural, class, country – when they have gone into communities with lofty thoughts of all the “help” they could bring, rather than receiving first the hospitality of others and look for the kingdom of God was already near.

It is hard though to tell personal stories of “Go” because they are often messy and incomplete. I can tell you times I crossed race, class, education, mental health divisions but I can only tell you the impact that had on me – I hesitate to say whether I made any meaningful impact on those to whom I went. My experiences were for a day, a week, sometimes a semester; hopefully, I was part of the reconciling work of God, but I don’t know how the story ended, I just know how it continued in me. Also, we make lots of mistakes when we cross lines of difference because we are outside our comfort zone, and so it can be hard both to confess that and to share other things for fear of appearing ignorant or self-righteous.

So instead of sharing a personal story, I’m going to share a reflection from Fr. Greg Boyle, the Jesuit priest I mentioned earlier who has worked with gang members in L.A. for decades. He has written a few books and done countless interviews, and during one of the interviews he was asked, how many lives he imagined he had saved? This is a man who has worked with hundreds of people who most had given up on because of their violence, their criminal record, their drug habits. Boyle responded, I am “not aware that I had saved any lives – I remain utterly convinced that my life had been saved, repeatedly, by the homies. When I need patience, the homies save me from my impatience. When I lack courage, they rescue me from my cowardice. And when I am completely convinced of the rightness of my position, the homies douse me with a big ol’ bucket of humility. Days don’t go by without them saving me.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Boyle, Gregory. *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, p. 174

When you cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus, the reconciling work of God is happening in you and in the people to whom you've gone. By widening the circle of inclusion, we take part in an integral part of God's message to us – all are welcome into the household of God. You, me, and every person we pass walking down Pennsylvania Avenue. By getting near to it, it's more than an idea, a theological point of view, it's a transformative practice.

In case you are hesitant to cross lines of difference, wondering what you have to offer, I leave you with a few more words of Boyle's wisdom. He shared a story about being asked to help mediate a gang dispute along with a few leaders in the community who had been former gang members but now were active in mentoring people out of the gang life. The former gang members said to Boyle that the gangs were more likely to listen to us than to you [because we've been there.] Boyle agreed with them, but only he noted "if the task is primarily talking to them . . . Fortunately for everyone, the solution has nothing to do with talking. . . receiving, listening, and valuing people until they come out with their hands up – feeling, for perhaps the first time, valuable. Receiving them and allowing yourself to be reached by them is all that's asked of us. And anyone who is a proud owner of a pulse can do this."<sup>4</sup>

So go and listen. In your workplaces when crossing lines of difference. In your school groups seek ways to cross lines of difference, in your neighborhood casual conversations, in the choices of where you spend volunteer time. Go and listen. In doing so, you live like Jesus. Anyone with a proud owner of a pulse can do it.

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<sup>4</sup> Boyle, Gregory. *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, p. 178