

## **“Selected, Sanctified, and Sent”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 12, 2024 - Seventh Sunday of Easter

[Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; John 17:6-19](#)

“Wanna get away?” we’ve been asked many times by Southwest Airlines in their long-running ad campaign, such as during one of their TV commercials showing a dinner guest using the host’s restroom and then sneaking a quick peek into its medicine cabinet when all of the cabinet’s shelves collapse, spilling their contents spectacularly and loudly, when a voice-over asks, “Wanna get away?”, and then gives some affordable airfare to fly away to a distant place. Others follow a similar trajectory, showing some person caught in a self-created, awkward situation or colossal but completely-relatable failure before we are asked if we, like the poor person trapped in the embarrassing situation, would like to get away.

I think that these ads ran for so long and were so effective because they were clever and funny, but also because, like their unfortunate and embarrassed protagonists, we do indeed want to get away! We long to get away from it all by taking vacations in which we travel away from our homes, perhaps going away to vacation homes or other places where we can relax, or experience stimulating environments that take our attention away from what regularly keeps our minds and bodies occupied at home, or reconnect with loved ones that we don’t regularly see (or pay enough attention to). These times away can be a real blessing in our lives as they can help us find some peace, and they can strengthen us to better deal with all of life’s usual business and busyness once we get back home, so these are good times to look forward to.

One of the dangers of our desire to get away from it all, though, is that this can easily become not a way to become better able to deal with life’s challenges, but a way for us to escape from dealing with them all together. When looking at the news of the day, which highlights so many of the world’s ongoing tragedies, from the effects of climate change to the devastation caused by natural disasters to the horrors of war to other terrible acts of violence to the awfulness of so many of our political leaders’ behaviors or ideas, I often feel like I want to get away -- *and stay away!*

But that, my friends, is not what we are called to do. Instead of escaping from the world with its many needs, we are called to live right in the middle of the mess. We do so because this is what Jesus did. We believe that God so loved the world - and cared for it and cared about all of the messes of its people -- God chose to experience the messiness of the world in the person of Jesus Christ and to save the world through him. And when Jesus' days on this earth were done, he left his world-saving work for his followers to carry on in his absence. Christ's way of doing God's work to bring goodness to this messy world was to be the way of Jesus' first disciples and all those who would later become his followers. All of us who have chosen to follow in the way of Jesus have been selected by God for this good task.

We the Church have been selected and, as we heard in our gospel lesson, sanctified, which is a term meaning made holy or set apart. While we live in this world, we are a people who are sanctified, set apart as different. In a hopeless world, we are peculiar in being hopeful. In this violent place, we are called to lives of peace. We are called to be different than the many who seek to gain for themselves at the expense of others by selflessly giving of ourselves in love for the good of others.

Our family of faith has been selected and set apart for this work of Christ, and we are sent by Christ into the world to do it! Wanna get away? Oftentimes, yes. Should we get away? No, for this would lead us to a colossal failure in our mission.

We are, instead, to be like worker bees, who support the well-being of their colonies by going out, gathering up nectar, and bringing it back in for others, at the same time enabling life outside of their communities to flourish and become more fruitful as they spread fertilizing pollen from one plant to another. And just as bee colonies (and the plants they pollinate) would not survive if the bees all hunkered down at home (or simply flew away), we too can only continue in our mission and thrive when we carry the good things we enjoy -- hope, peace, love, and joy -- out to others. You'll hear more about this today and in the next two weeks in our Stewardship Moments as our speakers will tell us more about how we as a church can continue in our mission of being Pollinators of Hope.

So today, let us not seek to hide from the world in a holy huddle or to escape from the world or ignore its many problems. Let us remember today our true calling as disciples of Christ -- selected, sanctified, and sent by him -- that this needy world would be blessed through the life we share and our work in the world. And as we bless with hope, peace, love, and joy, may these good fruits grow in abundance in our own hearts. Amen.