Voices of Sisters



Mercy Sr. Kelly Williams' modern cloak and parchment (Courtesy of Kelly Williams)

by Sr. Kelly Williams

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As I looked at today's readings for the feast of St. Luke the Evangelist (Oct. 18), I found myself noticing a different aspect of Paul's humanity in a way that I had not previously noticed.

I think, in my imagination, Paul was the kind of person who carried everything with him. I figured he lived as a mendicant. The more I think about this, I see where it doesn't add up. But the idea that Paul left behind a cloak in a different city definitely surprised me.

I mean, who hasn't had the experience of texting a friend, asking, "When you come, bring the cloak I left with Carpus in Troas, the papyrus rolls, and especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13)? I see you, Paul! If he had lived during the time of cellphones, maybe he, too, would have left his phone charger behind.

What truly caught my eye in this letter, though, was his request to Timothy to "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is helpful to me in the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Thinking about the need to bring together ministers to best serve, it speaks of community and Paul's recognition that ministry is easier when we do it together.

In today's Gospel, Jesus appoints “seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit” (Luke 10:1). The sending of pairs, and the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20), led to the way many communities, including my own, began our ministerial presence. Where two sisters go, there is Jesus among them.

My community took this to heart and we sent everyone out in pairs so often that we were known as the walking nuns!

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What does this idea of ministering together or in pairs look like in ministry today? Many of us vowed religious find ourselves serving in areas where we may be the only sister from our community, perhaps the only sister anyone has ever met? While my experience is with vowed religious, we all know many people can find a category in which they feel a sense of isolation. We may feel the loneliness that Paul experienced as he saw his friends leave the ministry. And yet, Paul knew who and

what he needed, and asked for both companionship and the simple tools to serve. He knew who would support him in ministry.

Do we know who we need to support the work we are being called to? Can we name places outside ministry to find the affirmation we need to propel us forward? Paul even knew that sometimes you've got to have that good cloak and the right parchments to make it happen. What tools do we need? Can we ask for them? Let us have the confidence of Paul to name what we need to support us in doing the work of the Lord that we are called to at this time and in our spaces.

I believe the support we need is always important. And now, that support is critical in a unique way. Some of us serve on the front lines of tragedies, others support through prayer and presence. I always stand by the understanding taught on airplanes that we must put on our own air mask before helping others. Sometimes an air mask is a retreat, sometimes it's a few minutes of silence, and sometimes that air mask looks like a long FaceTime.

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As we gather our support, we still recognize the ever-present truth of Jesus reminding the pairs that "the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Luke 10:2). How many times have we felt the weight of being one of very few laborers? Yet, this was true during Jesus' time and has always been the case, and still God has been all the more abundant.

While we may have few laborers, we are certainly well-trained in harvesting! Perhaps we are being invited to call the Marks in our lives and find ways to rest well, pray well, and be well so that we can do what God invites us to. For now, let us grab our cloaks and parchments, "eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'the kingdom of God is at hand for you' " (Luke 10:8-9).