

On January 3 I saw a story from The Washington Post about the new law taking effect in Oregon that allows Oregonians to pump their own gas. I was born and raised in Oregon, but we moved to Bellevue in 1974 when I was thirteen. I hadn't been back since I started driving. I didn't even know until 1995 that you couldn't pump your own gas in Oregon. I was a seminarian intern in Longview that year. I had a couple days off and decided that I would take a nostalgia trip back to Pendleton. Somewhere around The Dallas I stopped for gas. I got out and started for the pump when an attendant stopped me. "Stop! You can't do that." What!?

The Washington Post story described some of the negative reactions of Oregonians to the new law. One said, "I don't even know how to pump gas and I am 62, native Oregonian . . . I say NO THANKS! I don't like the smell of gasoline." Here's another one, "No! Disabled [people], seniors, people with young children in the car need help. Not to mention getting out of your car with transients around and not

feeling safe. This is a very bad idea. Grrr!” And my favorite, “I’ve lived in this state all my life and I refuse to pump my own gas. This is a service only qualified people should perform. I will literally park at the pump and wait until somebody pumps my gas.”

As a native son of the Beaver State I have a couple reactions. First, I’m embarrassed. Any trash-talking between Timbers and Sounders fans can be quickly ended by the Seattleite simply saying, “Yeah? Well, at least we know how to pump our own gas.” But, second, if there are any Oregonians in the house I just want to say, “It’s going to be OK. You can do this!”

In today’s Gospel we have Mark’s story of Jesus calling the first Disciples. In each case the person Jesus called must leave something behind and start anew. Peter and Andrew leave their nets and old way of life. James and John leave their father, their family. I want to look at that readiness to change and start something new. It’s always part of becoming a Disciple.

I actually realize that the majority of Oregonians are probably overjoyed at being liberated at the pump. But the reaction of some – as I’ve just read – is a very typical human reaction to change and being asked to do something strange and new. It’s hard. We ask ourselves, “Is this really necessary? I’m not qualified.”

If you go look at the south narthex wall you will see that we have put up a series of posters showing the stages of growth of a grape vine from seed to a mature vine full of clusters of grapes. The posters are meant to be a reminder to us, laying out the progression of Discipleship – Belonging, Becoming, Believing, Building, Bearing Fruit. Attached to this catchy “B” theme is a simple recognition that Christian Discipleship has stages. There are thresholds a person crosses as one grows in Christ. And crossing these thresholds can be hard and scary. Think of that life-long Oregonian getting out of the car, dodging the transients, and approaching the pump for the first time. Very scary! When Peter, Andrew, James, and John get up and follow Jesus that day by the Sea of

Galilee they weren't really Disciples yet. They needed to grow. That process would take years and many scary, or at least new, experiences.

So it is with us. Think of the thresholds we must cross. First, we have to feel some trust in someone or something around Jesus – come to a sense of belonging. We have to develop a curiosity about learning more. We have to become open to believing the faith. We must build up that relationship with Jesus and our knowledge of Him. Only then can we be sent out and bear fruit for Jesus' Kingdom. To become a Disciple is to be open to that growing, until eventually we realize that our spiritual life has gone from being self-centered to other-centered. We are meant to go out and bear fruit.

At every mass we pray together our Holy Family Prayer. It includes these words, "Heavenly Father please send your Holy Spirit . . . to help each of us take our next step in following Jesus." Notice: we don't say, "take our final step." We're not there yet. We take little steps. But we must continue to grow – even if it's scary.

Today, think of some ministry, action, practice within the faith and our community that scares or intimidates you. We can laugh at those Oregonians, but how many times have we looked at some role in the Church and thought, “I can’t do that! That’s a service only qualified people should perform.” It could be as simple as starting to sing in the pews at mass! It could mean volunteering at New Bethlehem or the welcoming ministry. It might mean joining a connect group if you are an introvert, or just think you’re too busy. Or the next step might mean committing to a prayer practice that seems too hard, or a way to step out and share your faith with those outside our church.

But there have to be next steps, movement, or we stagnate spiritually. Blessed John Henry Newman once said, “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” Becoming joyful, holy saints is a process of courageous change and growth, like that grape vine. That is what this parish is for – to be the safe place where we are meant to change and

grow into living the life of Jesus, step by step. So, once you have identified your own next step – have the courage to take it. Just get out of the car and pump the gas. It will be OK. You can do this.