



Pastor Gwen's Message

Sunday, June 14, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

In our Gospel reading from Matthew today we have “The Harvest is Great, the Laborers Few” which leads to Jesus telling the “Mission of the Twelve.” Jesus is still busily on his way to Jerusalem teaching, preaching and healing along the way. The disciples are with him and the crowds gather around. Jesus sees the people in the crowds as sheep with no shepherd, as they follow Him looking for a leader, a Messiah if you will. And Jesus comments to the disciples that this crowd is a huge field ready to be reaped. But there are only 13 of them ready to do the reaping.

Yet, Jesus calls his disciples by name and gives them clear authority to heal all diseases and sicknesses as well as cast out unclean spirits. This was a commissioning of a sort. What a job that would be for these 12 workers in such a large crowd. But Jesus said that they were ripe and ready for a change.

As Jesus sends out these disciples, he instructs them as to where to go. “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Now I don’t know about you, but I have always found that to be an unusual direction by Jesus. After all Jesus himself dealt positively with Gentiles and Samaritans. So why would he not want his disciples to go to these places. Were these towns not also fertile ground where the harvest was ready to reap? After a bit of reading commentaries, I learned that Jesus’ instructions were more of a geographical term, indicating a restriction to the area to be visited rather than a total ban on contact with Gentiles and Samaritans. Many believe that Jesus wanted to limit his current focus in Galilee, the area most responsive to his ministry, before broadening out to less receptive areas. He wanted his disciples to go where the people were fairly open to a new gospel and a new message.

And so this might have been a training exercise for the infamous 12 disciples. They were to go proclaim, cure, raise, cleanse and cast out, so basically proclaim and heal. Jesus gave them these tasks. There is no way any one of these twelve men could do any of this on their own without the help of the Holy Spirit. For without Jesus command, their human ability was too limited to complete the task. Jesus gave them the ability, the gifts needed to accomplish his instructions. And by curing, raising, cleansing and casting out attention is drawn to the real

message, which is “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”. “The Kingdom of heaven has come near” is more easily realized when the body has been made whole by one of the disciples.

And so what do we make of this passage. As disciples we are also called or commissioned to go out and proclaim the good news that God’s kingdom is here, right here on earth, just waiting for us. We were not given the same gifts as the disciples were to heal and cure people, but we are still called to proclaim the Gospel, good news of Jesus.

If you now fast forward in Matthew’s Gospel to chapter 28 where Bishop Eaton shared with us the Great Commission last week, we remember that we are called also to go and to baptize and to teach “all” nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So our job, our commission if you will, is now wider than our text today’s commissioning of the disciples. We are called to carry the message of Jesus into all the corners of the world. Thank God there are now more of us than the original 12 disciples to be laborers in the harvest. But yet are there still too few, who are telling the story of God’s love for all.

I remember at St Olaf when we did our spiritual renewal classes, we talked of the 6 marks of discipleship. Praying, reading God’s Word, worshiping, giving, encouraging and serving. I think 5 of the 6 marks were pretty easily defined, but the one of encouraging was probably the hardest to do and to send others off to do as well. How do we get more of us to go out and expose people to the blessings of the kingdom of God? How do we go out and share God’s love? It is a hard job and we are often not comfortable doing it. We find it difficult to even invite someone to come to church with us on a usual Sunday morning. And if we do, too often we are talking to folks who are already Christians, trying to get them in the pews here at CTS.

These people, folks, are not our target. They are not ours to harvest. Certainly, in today’s world we should not discriminate about who we target for ministry. Our target, or fields are those people who do not know Jesus and who desperately need Jesus in their lives. The only people we can exclude are those who already have Jesus in their hearts and understand that the Kingdom of God is in Christ Jesus.

Our mission, our field to harvest is large. And we should not be just looking to fill the pews at CTS, although that would be nice, but it is to fill people’s hearts with faith. To share how Jesus is working in our lives and what a difference he has made for us, is the start. We teach what we know. And I know that need to be pushed a bit to go out and tell our story about Jesus. But folks it can be as simple as living out your faith, for all to see.

There is a world all around us that desperately needs to know Jesus. People need to explore their faith now more than ever before. Just turn on the TV news, morning, noon or night and see the people who need Jesus in their lives. They are black, white, brown, gay, straight, old, young. Or we see them struggling with the effects of COVID 19. So, we need to show them the way to Our Savior.

And so how do we do that. We learn from Jesus and how he would handle a situation. Think with me for a minute. What would Jesus do, what would Jesus want us to do in light of the death of George Floyd? Does He want us to go out and riot in the streets and loot local businesses? I don’t think so. Does He want us to face, head on the racism around us? I do

think so. Does He want us to continue status quo? I don't think so. Does Jesus want us to go out and share His love with those who are hurting? I sure think so.

What a great scripture text for today. It really makes us think about issues of justice and racial equality. Our New Testament reading for today comes from Romans 5:1-8. Paul says, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through who we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." The passage ends with, "God proved his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." Christ died a horrible death for all. He suffered, died, was buried and then rose again to give us all the promises of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. Those promises are for all who come to know Jesus.

So, our commission is to go out and tell everyone we meet about Jesus. Tell them of His love for all people. All people were created in His image and we are called to tell the story to everyone who does not yet know the Lord so that they too can share the joy the Kingdom of heaven.

This week I read something I will not soon forget. It was a definition of being human. It said that that one definition of a human being is that we are the only animal that makes excuses. So, no excuses folks; too old, too young, too fat, too frail, all don't work! There is still a harvest that is plentiful for us. The kingdom of God is here!

Our psalm for today is Psalm 100. I usually quote this to those who tell me that they cannot sing. It is a wonderful song of thanksgiving. "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing." Not all of us were gifted with a beautiful voice, I can certainly attest to that. But the ending of this Psalm is even more powerful as it ends with these words, "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." **AMEN**