

“Called to Our Own House”
Matthew 9:35-10:8
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35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; 38 therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’ 10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

If you are like me, waking up to your whiteness in new ways in the wake of George Floyd's murder, perhaps you have also been like me and found that your white fragility has been on full display. White fragility, as race educator Robin DiAngelo defines it is "the defensive reaction that so many white people have when their positions or perspectives around race are questioned."¹ White fragility is what makes me protect my own feelings while missing the call to repentance prophetically spoken by my siblings of color. Honestly, it is my own white fragility that has kept me from taking serious steps to unpack my whiteness in the past, helping me avoid spending time and energy addressing the racist systems that undergird American society. It has sent me hiding over and over again in the privilege that is looking away because I can. And the two thoughts that have kept me paralyzed in my fragility, repeating themselves over and over again in my head have been: "I feel powerless" and "I don't know where to start."

And I've got to wonder if the disciples had some of the same thoughts running through their minds as Jesus turned to them and invited them into the hard work of proclaiming the good news. Up until now, they'd been following Jesus, learning from his teaching, watching him tick off the religious authorities as he embraced the outcasts of their society, and scratching their heads as he continued to defy their expectations for a Messiah. And now, in a strange turn of events, Jesus turns to *them*, surprising them with God's plan A, which was that *they* were being called to do the very things Jesus was doing! Things like curing the sick, resurrecting the dead, casting out unclean spirits and demons! I

¹ White Fragility in Teaching and Education: An Interview With Dr. Robin DiAngelo, by Mary Jo Madda (Columnist), Aug 23, 2018, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-08-23-white-fragility-in-teaching-and-education-an-interview-with-dr-robin-diangelo>

wonder if they had the same thoughts flooding their minds that I have experienced over the past few weeks. “But Jesus, I feel powerless. And how on earth am I supposed to know where to start?”

The good news is that Jesus is calling us out of the white fragility and the fear that keep us in paralysis the same way he called the disciples onto a new path of spreading the good news. Though the disciples may have *felt* powerless, the reality is that Jesus “*gave them authority* over unclean spirits,” the text says, “to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” The call on the lives of the disciples was not to retreat in fear, but to embrace the gift of power Jesus had given to them so that oppressive forces might be cast out, that diseases of body and soul might be healed, that brokenness would be made new. And if we know anything about white supremacy, it’s that it is a communal disease, an unclean spirit that has crept into every corner of our society, not the least of which is our system of American policing. It is not accurate to talk about the problem of systemic racism as if it were a few bad apples or individual racists. No, we are talking about a collective disease that infects all of us because we are socialized from birth to view Black and brown bodies as less than white bodies.

But thanks be to God, Jesus has not left us without power. We have been given *authority*. We may feel powerless, but in our baptism, with the Spirit filling us, with Jesus living in and through and beside us, we are filled with God’s power. In this historical moment, are we living like this is true?

And perhaps beyond feelings of powerlessness, the disciples looked at Jesus’ radical work of healing and casting out

demons and loving the outcast and thought: “How on earth will I know where to start?” To this, Jesus has an answer too. “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” We know from many other parts of Matthew that the mission of Jesus expanded wider and wider to include those beyond Israel, those “outsiders” known as the Gentiles. But in the beginning, it is instructive that Jesus sends them first to their own house, their own people. The unclean spirits that needed casting out? According to Jesus, those demons were to be found in the very community of God’s people who had been intended to carry God’s love to the world. Is it not the same with the white American Church? In white Christianity, we have so often clung to visions of ourselves as generally good, charitable people. I know I grew up building this identity only to have it reinforced on every side by the churches I was raised in. So when I finally started to open my eyes and look at the suffering of Black communities that has always been there, it made me want to jump straight into helper mode, fixer mode, also known as “white savior” mode. But that can lead us to move outward without acknowledging all that we are called to unpack inside us - a daily discipline of interrogating how the unclean spirit of white supremacy has infected us too. And this unpacking gets uncomfortably specific. I say that I am against racism, but am I reading, listening, and paying attention to any voices from the Black community that push me out of my comfort zone? Have I looked at the Kearny family budget as the most theological document in our household and asked myself, Does my wealth serve to lift up and empower Black and indigenous communities

of color? How often am I supporting Black-owned businesses? Are the companies I support using prison labor for their manufacturing, prisons that disproportionately incarcerate Black and brown bodies? Am I finding ways to pay reparations to my siblings of color that are significant and consistent enough to necessitate a change in my lifestyle? When I look at my weekly schedule, is it clear that I am practicing anti-racism by using my time to search out the ways I have internalized racial bias? To volunteer in an organization led by people of color to liberate people of color? To have conversations with white family members to challenge them in their perspectives and choices? To reach out to those institutions where I have influence to demand they take action in dismantling the white supremacy that has infected them? I challenge you to schedule time in your week to sit down with yourself, with your families, and have these hard conversations. And your pastors would love to be in conversation with you as you do - don't hesitate to give us a call. This is why Jesus sends us to our own houses first as we begin the holy work of casting out unclean spirits and curing diseases. This is why one of the first steps of our congregation is to invite all of you to read "So You Want to Talk about Race" as we unpack our own internalized racism. This is why LPC gave out of our church budget to bail out protesters who are leading this movement to root out the communal sin of our country. This why your pastors are getting involved in advocacy conversations locally to see how we can be a part of a radical transformation in Longview. These are the first steps on a long road of work, work that will last the rest of our lives. Our own lives and schedules and budgets and

internal worlds are the first places in need of the good news of Jesus Christ, the first places in need of radical transformation.

Friends, I know this is like drinking from the firehose. It's overwhelming. The road will be a long and difficult one. But I remind you that Jesus sent out "the twelve", a community, not a gaggle of isolated individuals. We are in this together. And I remind you of the last words of Jesus in this gospel to his disciples as he ascended and empowered them to do what he had been doing. "*And remember,*" Jesus said, "*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" We are not abandoned. We are empowered by Christ's very presence in and through and among us. Beloved, we can do hard things because it is Christ in us who has promised to do them. Amen.