

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7)

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)

It's been an amazing couple of weeks to say the least. While all of us were still trying to come to grips with the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown designed to slow it down, we were suddenly thrust into a reality moment that stopped all of us in our tracks...at least for a minute or two...and then sent many of us scurrying out into the streets once again to express our outrage and our grief at the death of yet another black person at the hands of police. Where are you God? We're leaning on what we know about you, but we don't know where you are. We're reading the scripture and we're listening to Jesus, but we need for you, Lord, to show us the way.

So much of the way that God shows us is through the life and teachings of Jesus. We learn about God and what God wants for us and from us by learning about Jesus. And we learn about Jesus through passages in the New Testament that tell his story.

This morning, Jesus is telling his disciples what he wants them to do. He commissions them...he gives them authority to heal in his name. And he tells them how to go out into the world...with no provisions...completely dependent on the kindness of strangers. He wants them to relieve suffering wherever they find it. And he tells them that theirs will not be an easy life. There are dangers out there. Jesus tells them that he is sending them like lambs in the midst of wolves, so they are to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. And he tells them that people in power will have them arrested and flogged because they don't like what the disciples are saying or doing.

We learned more about the nature of God a couple of Sundays ago when we welcomed the Holy Spirit. For the disciples it arrived as a mighty wind shaking walls and rattling windows and leaving a flame over the heads of each one of them. They were just plain fishermen. They weren't highly educated people. Most of them had never been more than a few miles away from the spot where they were born, but there they were in Jerusalem for Pentecost...the Jewish celebration that happens 50 days after Passover. The city was overflowing with people from all over the known world. The mixture of multiple languages was unintelligible. But when the Holy Spirit landed on each of these disciples...these uneducated, unworldly men, they began to tell the story of Jesus in languages they had never even heard before...let alone mastered in terms of fluency. The Holy Spirit gave them skills and powers beyond their wildest imaginations. And they baptized about 3,000 people that day in the name of Jesus Christ. Now if Jesus had told them ahead of time what they

would be able to do, none of them would have believed him. That's what happens when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We are able to do things that we never would have believed we could do. And each one of us has access to the Holy Spirit. Remember that!

That's what happened to hundreds of thousands of people in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. A lot of them started doing things they didn't think they could do! Through the magic of cell phone video, we all saw it....and we saw it all!! We probably all saw it more times than we wanted to or needed to. And it moved us. It got us up off our couches and out of our comfort zone and propelled us into the streets to protest that this has been going on for far too long and that this should not happen to anyone...ever. I looked at television coverage of city after city after city where the streets were clogged with people protesting that this is not right and this has to stop. There just seemed to be a sea of people in every direction...in big cities...in small towns... and in rural communities. People were coming together and saying loudly and clearly: this is *not* what America is all about! This is not what our ideals call us to be. But, sadly, this *is* who we currently are and have been since our inception. As I looked at all the clogged streets, I thought to myself: there's the harvest that Jesus was talking about. That sea of people. This is what Jesus wanted us to see. The harvest is plentiful, said Jesus, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord to send more laborers into his harvest.

We are followers of Jesus Christ. We are the laborers he asked his disciples to pray for. We are the laborers for the plentiful harvest. It's right here in front of us! There's so much work to be done and so many people searching for answers. Some of them may already be Christians. But many of them may be as lost as the crowds that Jesus gazed upon. He had compassion for those crowds because they were harassed and helpless. Jesus said they were like sheep without a shepherd. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Jesus sent his disciples...and us...out into the world with a mission. He told them to take care of the needs of the people and to proclaim the good news that 'The kingdom of God has come near.' I've always wondered what that would be like...to be some place where the kingdom of God had come near. And then I saw another video. Maybe you saw it, too. There was a sheriff in a small town in Pennsylvania who was sent out to monitor some protestors. He started talking to them and he took off his helmet and set down his baton and he listened to them. He reassured them that he wasn't there to harm them...that he wanted all of them to be safe...and then he asked them what they needed from him...and they began to chant, "Walk with us!" All of a sudden he had a big smile on his face and he said, "I don't want this to be a protest march; I want this to be a parade!" And he began to walk with them. And I thought to myself: God was present in that moment. In that exchange and between those people; to be sure, the kingdom of God had come near! We get a glimpse of it every now and then.

But Jesus warned his disciples that they would encounter hostility. He told them that he was sending them out like sheep into the midst of wolves. It will be dangerous, he said. Not everyone wants to do things differently. And human nature has not changed much since the days when Jesus walked the earth. Have you ever noticed that people in power do not relinquish it voluntarily? It has to be wrested from them. And it's not easy and it's not safe. Jesus told his disciples to beware because those in power would hand them over to councils and they would be flogged in synagogues. Who would want to volunteer for such treacherous work? And yet, that's what Jesus asked them to do. And that's what Jesus is asking us to do. He's asking us to step out on his behalf...out of our comfort zone...to take care of our brothers and sisters...God's children. And it won't always be easy. And it won't always be successful.

We don't have to look far to see that so many of our brothers and sisters are in trouble. We don't have to look far to see a system that is rigged against an entire group of people. We don't have to look far to see the oppression and the cruelty perpetrated on these people by people in power. And Jesus is looking at us and telling us to go to our brothers and sisters...take care of their needs; bind up their wounds; soothe their hearts; and fight to remove the oppression and the fear that they live with every single day. That's *our* mission. And let's be clear: Jesus is sending us on this mission. We have been given our marching orders...like it or not. We are expected to go out into the world and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come near! We are Christians...followers of Jesus Christ...and we are expected to do something! Our baptismal covenant requires that we proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. That means we have to speak up and sometimes we have to act up! That baptismal covenant requires that we seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. It says 'all' persons, not just the ones who are just like us. It means everybody... particularly those who need us the most. It means the ones who look like us and the ones who don't. It means the ones who think the same way we do and the ones who don't. And it requires us to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. That's what we are being called on to do right now...to strive for justice...and we have a long way to go.

God puts a calling on the heart of each one of us. I'm going to ask you to include in your prayers a request to God that the calling meant for you is made very clear to you. That you will not only have that call revealed to you, but you will be given the energy and the will and the strength and the courage and the determination to pursue it. Prayer is a discernment process. It changes our thinking. It allows God to move among our thoughts. It changes us. And when that happens, we can change what happens around us.

Jesus calls each one of us to do something a little different. Every call from God is unique. Have you thought about what God has called you to do? As a congregation, have we thought

about what God is calling St. Paul's to do? At the end of our lives, there is an accounting for each of us. I'm not too worried about the sins I've committed by doing something. I'm pretty much of a rule follower. I certainly make lots of mistakes, but I'm not mean and I don't intentionally hurt people. So I'm pretty OK with the sins of commission. What has me worried are the sins of omission...the things I knew I was supposed to do and didn't. What am I going to do when God looks me in the eye and says, 'When you saw your neighbor and your brothers and sisters...my children...in trouble...why did you do nothing?' Why did you do nothing! And I'm not going to be able to answer that.

Thankfully, I have a little more time, I hope, to rectify the situation. With God's help and blessing, there is still time for me to do *something*. And there's still time for you to answer your call as well. There is still time for St. Paul's to answer its call and to do something. There is still time to do something in the name of Jesus Christ to further the arrival of the kingdom and to fulfill our baptismal covenant. The harvest is plentiful, brothers and sisters, and we are the laborers Jesus told his disciples to ask for.

May God give each one of us the grace and the courage to answer the call that's been put on our hearts.

Through the power of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.