

### “Send Me”

One of the standard devices in films and television whether it be comedy or drama is sending someone on a simple errand. For example, sending a child to the market to purchase one item can be a setup for so much comedy, adventure, or drama. The child might get distracted along the way and forget their errand. A bully might steal their money. They might make it to the store but purchase the wrong item confusing items that sound alike or look similar. The hopeless husband is nearly as bad and can fall prey to the same issues; although he is more likely to buy everything but what is needed having forgotten the purpose of his errand in quick order. An adult woman is less likely to commit such an error, unless there is a shoe store planted in her path. Of course, these are all stereotypes and none of them particularly kind.

Today gospel has Jesus sending out the disciples on a much more complex errand. Jesus like the mother sending the child to the shops has a long list of cautions and instructions for the naïve disciples. What spurs it is not the need for a spice or culinary item, but a sad and weary crowd of people.

Previously in this chapter Jesus has encountered crowds of people wherever he goes. He has been busy preaching and teaching. He has healed two blind men, a paralytic, and a mute. He has restored a girl to life and healed a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. He has also found time to teach on fasting, and call Matthew the tax collector to be one of his disciples. He has been so busy with his ministry he could be forgiven if he were to kick back and take a long weekend. But he there was something about the crowds that nagged at him.

Some gospel accounts tell us how the crowds were amazed and clamoring to be close to Jesus. Other times the crowds are mesmerized by his teaching or astounded at his power of healing. In other accounts the crowds wonder at his authority and ability to turn the tables on the Pharisees and scribes. In this instance we see what Jesus sees, crowds who are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

This leads him to make a new ministerial move. Instead of trying to do it all himself he decides to commission his disciples to take part in his ministry. He changes their role from that of disciple (student), and transforms them to apostles (ones sent out). Ready or not, he gives “them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” As the passage goes on he gives them a load of instructions on what to take with them, how to treat those who are hospitable and those who are not. He tells them to be wise as serpents and innocent as lambs. He instructs them not to take payment, and lets them know they will, at times, be persecuted.

Did anyone notice that he did not give them instructions on how to “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons”? Like the mom sending a child to the market to make a purchase who describes all of the pitfalls and hazards along the way, but falls to point out the difference between grapes and grapefruit or cooking oil and motor oil, Jesus’ instructions assume the most

important part of the mission is the easy part. There is no record that Doubting Thomas raised his hand to point out they had not been trained in healing lepers. Nor did Judas Iscariot tell Jesus this was off mission which was to overthrow the Roman oppressor. They listened attentively and then went; disciples one minute and apostles the next.

As we continue to deal with restrictions on movement due to COVID-19, economic recession, and civil unrest over persistent racial injustice, people ask me, “What am I to do?” “How can I make a difference?” I sense that they feel a bit like those crowds Jesus encountered, “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” There is a desire to do something, but also a feeling of helplessness due to months of lockdown. We haven’t been able to DO anything for three months. So we throw up our hands in despair and slouch back to the sofa in our pajamas to binge another show in the attempt to escape our ennui.

I suppose Jesus could have given up feeling that his ministry was not making a difference or that the need was too great. He could have been dragged down in despair and slouched home to Nazareth. Instead, he is inspired to commission his students as leaders, preachers and healers. So he sends out his twelve closest followers who are sorely unprepared for the task and says “heal them.” They went.

When someone asks me “What am I to do?” or “What are we as a church to do?” I could parrot Jesus’ speech, but instead, I suggest that they do what Jesus did. Look around you. Identify a need and see what you can do. Thursday I attended a meeting of the Seven Loaves Board of Directors. In the group there were folks who worked in the pantry sorting and bagging food, some worked with the public handing out food and others may food pickups at supermarkets. Some people had concerns about too much contact with the public so they worked on off days to organize and stock the pantry shelves. Others who were warier of contact worked from home researching sources of funds and writing grants.

There is work to do and many ways to do it. Whether it being feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, working for racial justice or any of a myriad of ways to contribute. If you get turned down by one group reach out to another. Find a way to help. As Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” There is plenty of work to be done find a way to help.

I attended a church once that had a special brass plaque set in the brick work. It was situated so that one did not see it upon entering but only as you exited. The plaque read, “Our ministry begins here.”

Church is where we come to get invigorated for the ministry to which God calls us. Go forth today as apostles of the living God doing the work God has given us to do. This aching and broken world needs every one of us doing our part to bring to fruition the words from the Lord’s Prayer— “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That is our calling pre-COVID, during COVID, post COVID and as long as we see need and injustice anywhere.