

## Pentecost 2A. June 12, 2020. Matthew 9:35-10:23.

Beloveds, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that God has not abandoned us or the bruised world, and never will. The life of Jesus Christ is our sign that there is no depth to which God's love will not pursue us. God is here, among the sweat and the shouting and the grieving. God is here, in the frustration and the hope and the fury. God in Jesus Christ shares our life: the joy and friendship, the rejection and pain, the fear and disappointment, all the way to and through death. And because he shares our life and death, we share in his triumph over death. There is no depth to which God's love will not pursue us, and there is no grave from which God cannot bring forth new and transformed life. That's the good news.

The bad news is that a constitutive part of God's unwavering commitment to the world is . . . us. Jesus looks out over the crowds and has compassion on them. They are harassed and helpless, without good leadership, in desperate need. He turns to his disciples and says, "hey, there's a lot of work to do here. Ask God to send more help." And here's the perilous thing about prayer: in the next verse Jesus commissions the apostles to be that help. We pray, and then we make sure our shoes are tied because often God makes our own work a part of the answer to our prayers. We pray for an end to famine and hunger, and then we work at the food pantry. We pray for the end of homelessness and then we support the work of Housing Forward in ending homelessness and advocate for better housing solutions at the village level. We pray for justice and peace, and that the dignity of all people would be respected. And then we join the heart-wrenching and costly work of anti-racism.

Jesus sends out the twelve, and us, to continue his work. As he went through the villages and towns preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing the sick, so they and we are told to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near, as it always does when the seams of the world are starting to tear. To bring healing and new life, restoration to the outcasts, and deliverance for the oppressed and possessed.

That work is tangible. It has to do with the well-being of bodies here and now. Yes, they are to preach that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. *And* they are to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. Most of these instructions are about improving the lives of suffering people now. The work of Jesus, into which the apostles are invited (or perhaps "voluntold," in a wonderful phrase I learned here at St. C's), is fleshy and present tense. It is about liberating people from what is keeping them from full life now. When the kingdom of heaven draws near, it changes our life now, even before the kingdom fully arrives.

That work is controversial and even dangerous. Jesus in no way pretends that their message and work will receive universal acclamation. They are to expect resistance and apathy. Eventually they are to expect even violence and legal trouble. Any excitement about the new authority they have been given must have ebbed away by the time Jesus finished talking about sheep among wolves, getting whipped in synagogues, brothers betraying each other to the death, and being hated by everyone. At the end of all this talk about enemies, it's easy to forget that this whole thing began with Jesus' compassion for the crowds, his compassion probably for some of

these same folks who are going to reject and persecute the apostles. Jesus sends the apostles out with the word of hope and the work of liberation indiscriminately. They are to go to all the people of Israel, without regard for likelihood of success, but only adjusting as they are received. The apostles are barely trained, surely ill-equipped, and are told to do the impossible in the face of opposition—but they are not alone. God will be with them even in jails and on trial.

We are living through two terrible public traumas right now: a global health pandemic and a reckoning with the racism that has defined American life for hundreds of years. We are tired and disoriented and afraid and angry. And, we are not alone. The kingdom of heaven has drawn near, the love of God has been poured into our hearts, hope will not disappoint us. God draws near to us, to all who are suffering. And, as we pray for a better world, assuredly, we are sent to work for it.

We are at least as ill-equipped and unready as those first apostles and lord knows the suffering we face in the world doesn't seem less. If we are sent, many of us don't really have any idea of where to go or what to do. And that's not the worst thing. A little humility will do us all some good right now. The pandemic calls us all to follow the lead of scientists and the reckoning with racism calls those of us who are white to follow the lead of people of color. But there is something distinctive about how we members of the church are sent.

We are sent like the apostles, even in the midst of danger and controversy, to care for the sick, to find new life where others see only death, to restore the outcast, to participate in the liberation of those who are oppressed and possessed. And to insist on proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. God is here, at work in the streets, in our homes, and in our hearts. Amen.