

Priceless

Tender shepherd to the helpless and lost; we praise you for sharing your power with a motley band of stumbling friends: may we who have received without payment give without charge and so bring your kingdom near; through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the harvest.

A Collect for Proper 6A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Exodus 19:2-8a; Psalm 10:1-4; Matthew 9:35-10:8

JUNE 18, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 9:35-10:8

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. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

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. 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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

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. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Social media is often criticized for the way in which people present in it the positive or interesting aspects of their lives, projecting a superficial impression of prosperity and happiness.

In some ways, I feel, that use of social media may be maturing a bit, communicating what one might have written a letter or made a phone call to say in the past: my grandkids are in town, my child has

graduated, here's a picture of the bride or groom, this is where I am right now, I saw this intriguing, funny or perplexing thing today... and so on.

What the criticism expresses, though, is something we all know and don't want to lose in the larger conversation: life is actually very difficult. We want to push back the sense that some people are just sailing through from one fortunate and beautiful scene to another – while the rest of us are only slogging along.

There's a slog.

It's what Jesus sees: "they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd...."

It's part of the gift of an open and hospitable community, a web of friendships we have here at St. Mark's, extending out beyond this campus, drawing others in, serving others wherever we go: we recognize and can share the reality of being harassed and helpless, what it's like to be sheep without a shepherd. No one escapes that experience...

...Including Jesus, we remember. Though there was no selfie from the cross, we know about that: the betrayal, being judged innocent and getting killed anyway.

That's a human experience, repeated again and again.

Jesus identified with the lost, the least, the left out.

He radically identifies with all those same aspects of our humanity now.

Jesus also realized the human capacity for wholeness, for discovering and bearing in our minds, hearts, bodies, relationships, and communities the fullness of God's image, the imprint of vital reality.

Why else go around: "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness"?

If there wasn't this larger possibility inherent in every moment, it would have been a "why bother."

Our lives, the life of the world are not a "why bother" to God.

Within the life of God, this creation and how we live in it is a matter of ultimate concern.

Ultimate concern that is shared with all of us.

We see the action Jesus took and also that he empowered those around him to do what he did. This is the critical shape of things: people are sent by Jesus, and, in that, we are sent *as* Jesus. There is nothing new or novel about that insight and reality.

Recall the famous saying attributed to Teresa of Ávila: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he

looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

Our lives have plenty of being harassed and helpless. And then, both for ourselves and for others, we are given, in our particular and differing ways, the work of discerning, encouraging, naming, witnessing, celebrating, supporting, collaborating... Through who we are, what we do we proclaim good news, work for restoration of strength and wholeness and health....

Harassed and helpless – no doubt – and also able to live in God.

At the end of today’s gospel reading we find: “You received without payment; give without payment.”

One way in which we can find our own encouragement is to be increasingly aware of the richness of our lives, what we have received through our lives, what we receive in every moment, the profound miracle of a breath and a thousand small abilities that attend us at all times – and the worlds upon worlds that are unfolding around us continually. This larger experience of reality is, in fact, priceless, and it is from that priceless abundance we share life with others....

Of course, we may need a consistent contemplative practice to let that awareness of priceless rise in us sufficiently to balance or provide a context for being “harassed and helpless” – which always seems more urgent.

... and your thoughts?



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