



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen.

So today's gospel, I think, can be a little hard to follow without the context. So I want to back up just a minute here back to Chapter 9 of Matthew, which has Jesus moving about the countryside, teaching healing, casting out demons, raising the dead. But the chapter ends with Jesus remarking at the sheer magnitude of the crowds. So many. So many in need, still suffering, still lost. More than he could ever minister to alone. Is He overwhelmed? Is He filled with despair? No. Matthew tells us He's filled with compassion, so much so that He turns to His disciples and tells them, the harvest is plentiful, so we are going to need some more laborers.

Jesus tells them that if they pray for help, God will send help. And as we see in the very next chapter, they are that help. The disciples themselves are the answer to their own prayers. So all through Chapter 10, Jesus is preparing them to be sent out, to extend His reach by doing what He's been doing. Proclaim the good news, heal the sick, raise the dead, care for the outcasts, and be peacemakers wherever you go. And notice He doesn't tell them, go out and tell them about me and about all the wonderful things I've been doing. Jesus tells them to go and do what I've been doing. You are the laborers now.

And before He sends them out, Jesus gives them some instruction that is vital today. First thing He says is, you don't need to go to some far off country. You don't need to go to the Gentiles. You don't need to go to the Samaritans. Start with your own community, your own neighborhood. Those with whom you already have some connection, a shared language, a common story on which to build.

Secondly, He tells them, travel lightly, leave your baggage, leave your agendas behind. You don't need special training. You don't need to be an expert on the Bible. You don't need a bunch of money. You don't need a big fundraiser. You already have what you need. The Holy Spirit has already given you the gifts so that you can love and serve as you have been loved and served. So go empty handed, but with an open heart and open eyes. Be present. Listen. Ask questions. Get curious. Notice where the Holy Spirit is already at work in someone's heart and join with it. Partner with it. Fan its flames.

Then He warns them. Not everyone is going to be open to our message. We will encounter people in this world who think they have life all figured out, like they

have it all under control, right? Can we think of someone like that? Have we been that person? People who don't think they need anyone or anything? Thank you very much. When they slam the door in our face, what does Jesus say to do? Don't badger them. You don't need to threaten them. Wish them well and dust off your feet. And go to the next, and go to the next and the next until you find someone with the eyes to see, and the ears to hear. Someone who knows their need for something more in their life. Those who have figured out that the false idols of this world do not fill their hearts for long. Those who have started to ask new questions because their old answers have failed them. Those who are ready to die to their old life so that they might rise to something new.

Finally, Jesus tells them it's not going to be easy. Announcing the reign of God, speaking truth to power, being a champion for the outsider, standing up for the marginalized, defending those who are bullied. It's going to make us some enemies. It's going to cause some divisions. It's going to get us kicked out of some of our clubs. It may even divide our families. Following Jesus will cause conflict because peace, true peace was never measured by the absence of strife, but always by the presence of justice.

And as we prepare to celebrate the 4th of July and the birth of this great country, the first in the world to declare boldly that all people are created by God and are endowed at their birth with fundamental rights, human rights to life, to liberty, to equal justice and equal opportunity, equal for all God's children. That's the more perfect union to which we have always strived. And while we have made incredible progress, while we are still a beacon of hope for so much of the world, we have still a lot of work to do. The harvest is still plentiful, but the laborers sometimes seem too few. And at times such as this past week, it feels like we take a step back for every one or two we thought we had taken forward.

The march of justice is slow. It's painful at times, but as Dr. King said, we may not get there in our lifetime. We may not get there in my children's lifetime, but make no mistake, we will get there. We will get there. The arc of history is long, but it inevitably bends toward justice. And it doesn't bend on its own. Greater justice breaks into this world because for 2000 years, followers of Jesus have gone out into the harvest to be peacemakers, to stand up for those left behind, to speak up for those who have been silenced too long. The arc of history bends when the followers of Jesus see that we too are the answers to our own prayers.

Do you see yourself that way? Do you see yourself as someone who's been sent? I can imagine with all the emphasis that we sometimes place on coming to church. That we can sometimes forget that or get confused and think that that's something that's handled by a ministry or a committee of some kind. But being Christian means being sent. God sends Jesus and Jesus sends us, and when they receive us, they receive the one who sends us.

So where is Jesus sending you? Who are the lost sheep in your life? Who would Jesus have you bring home? Where is the suffering in your corner of the world that Jesus would have you heal? Might it be to our own neighbors? Those right in the backyard. Those right next door. Do we know their names? Are we curious about their lives? Do we know the longings of their heart? Is one of them suffering from emphysema and needs help in her garden? Was there a neighbor sitting on the curb outside of his home the other day having lost his wife of 50 years, wondering how he will cook the meals she once made? Well, walk with him in the morning.

Is Jesus sending us to our places of work? Do we see ourselves as a missionary to our workplace, to minister to those in the cubicle next door? Do we know someone whose rent is about to double, worried that he may have to find another job? Is the administrator at our company worried about her husband's surgery? Have we taken time to get to know that new employee, the one who's having trouble making friends? How might we share with them God's peace? What might we do to cast out their demons of doubt and despair? Where is Jesus sending you? Might it be to the workout partner at the gym going through a divorce? The guy who posted on Nextdoor the other day, anybody interested in organizing a block party? Or the student at the coffee house where I wrote this sermon, asking questions about life and faith.

God is at work in each of those hearts. Do we hear the cries? Are we like Jesus moved with compassion, or do we get overwhelmed? Do we look upon the magnitude of the crowds and despair at problems that seem too many and too big? I know I often feel that way. I too want to fix, I want to solve, but often all I can do is just take the time to listen, to listen to, to be with, to feel with, to pray for. And while that doesn't seem like much, I have noticed that by starting there, by starting somewhere, the Holy Spirit can lead us to something much more, an invitation to dinner, a conversation over coffee, a visit to the hospital, the lending of a hand.

And sometimes those small gestures lead to something far greater. Maybe that is what Jesus is referring to when He reminds us that even a cup of cold water can be enough to receive God's love. Have you had a moment like that when a simple gesture made such a profound impact on you that you have never forgotten it?

The poet Oscar Wilde lived at a time when no one blinked at the idea that you could be sentenced to prison for being gay. And when Oscar Wilde was arrested, the authorities saw fit to parade this world renowned poet and playwright through the dusty streets of London. Where crowds could gather and jeer him and spit on him. And yet one day out of the corner of his downcast eye, he saw a man with the courage to stand apart from the crowd, who in defiance of

the mob, tipped his hat as Oscar Wilde passed by. Like a modern day Simon of Cyrene, a simple gesture that helped to restore a dignity and a humanity when his cross seemed too much to bear.

Oscar Wilde would later write, the memory of that lowly silent act of love has unsealed for me all the wells of pity, made the desert blossom like a rose, and brought me out of the bitterness of lonely exile into harmony with the wounded, broken, and great heart of the world.

A simple cup of water offered to a dry soul. Perhaps it will be through such small acts of such deep kindness and mercy when taken together, when taken to their natural conclusion, that will bring peace and justice to this wounded world, perfecting our union a little bit each time until the promised land of God's reign breaks in.

Amen.