

‘Laborers in the Field’ – Final draft sermon 6/14/20

Last week we had ‘The Great Commission.’ The Great Commission is the instruction that Jesus gives his disciples to spread the ‘good news’ of the Gospel to the world. I will read part of it where Jesus says, “All authority on Heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The King James version writes it this way, **[Slide - Matthew 28:19 “ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”]**. Instead of ‘make disciples of all nations,’ we are called to ‘teach all nations.’ It is a way to ‘be’ in the world. After all, Jesus didn’t force the disciples to follow him; they were invited. I remember a sermon by the Methodist minister J. Ellsworth Kalas, who talked about Jesus and the disciples being winsome. By winsome I mean, likable, good-natured and engaging. People liked to be around them and they were attracted to them. It is worthwhile to ‘lift up’ this element of following Jesus and his followers.

We read today that Jesus is...

**[SLIDE**

- 1) Teaching in their synagogues**
- 2) Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom**
- 3) Curing every disease and every sickness. ]**

We see Jesus acting in a ‘way to be.’

Jesus sees the crowds and has compassion for them. We have many crowds today that through us, Jesus can look on with compassion: Crowds affected by COVID-19, police, firefighters, health care workers, the black community, protestors, the marginalized and oppressed, and many more. Jesus sees them all and has compassion on them and calls us to

do the same. We can't ignore any of them because Jesus sends us out to ALL of them. He sends his disciples and us because, **[SLIDE] "The harvest is great, but the laborers are few."**

We have a lot of workers in the field here at Divinity, and I want to take a moment to hold some of them up now. This pandemic has thrown a wrench in a lot of our social ministries, yet the workers in the field continue to press forward. I am going to give my best shot here so please, I apologize if I miss anyone: Youth, Parma Park Elementary, Community Meals, Mission Trips, AA Meetings, Homebound Communion, Lay Visitation, Prayer Chain, Prayer Shawl, Parish Health, Music, Library, YMCA Summer Camp, Stephen Ministry, Via de Cristo, Voyagers, Women of the Church, Vacation Bible School, council, council leadership, assisting minister, music ministry, Worship, Food Pantry, Quilt of Valor, Baptismal boxes, Ladies of the Yarn, Prayer Shawls, Stephen Ministry, Prayer Ministry, finance, parish education, stewardship, grounds and maintenance, and finally, YOU! You who have been faithful, obedient, and kind. You who share the love of Christ.

Frankly, I have one of the easier roles. I get to preach the Gospel, which I love to do, and I am very visible. So it looks like I do a lot, but don't be fooled. I want to say that I am grateful for your cards, emails, and texts. They have caught me off guard and lifted my spirit up in some challenging moments. I want to take the time to say, "Thank you!" We have workers in the field of Divinity who are not seen and keep pressing forward. So many of you are hard workers who are in the fields for long lonely hours. Others (like me) spend less time in the fields, but our small contributions together create a great movement for the body of Christ. Thank you! **[slide of our sanctuary with people in it]** We all look forward to that time when we will be together 'bodily' again.

We are people who know the voice of the shepherd. It is a voice that is not destructive but knows how to be in this world of chaos and uncertainty. I thank you for modeling that for me as well as for each other. Together we are doing something that parallels what is happening in the Gospel, and in our Exodus story.

My professor, Rolf Jacobson, points out that God reconstitutes us. He explains that in the Old Testament, we have three moments of chaos, and significant change that comes out of those experiences, and Dr Jacobson points out what God is doing in those moments. At the tower of Babel, after the Exodus from Egypt (which we read about today) and through the experience of exile, God reconstitutes God's people for the sake of mission. Some other words for reconstitutes are to rebuild and regenerate.

**[SLIDE]. Exodus 19:5 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'**

I hesitate to say, 'Could there be a more chaotic time for us?' because the answer is YES! But in this time of chaos, God is here with us, to reconstitute us, and we can reside in a Holy existence with God. **[SLIDE – Holy picture inside of a temple or church]** Through Christ, God transforms us into a priestly community of believers. I see that in so much of what you are doing during this pandemic - letting God continue to mold and shape us into a holy community for the sake of God's mission into the world.

Jesus sends his disciples out into the field to work, but it is not entirely safe out there. This passage speaks to the need for the disciples to have faith. Jesus soon warns them that they will be going out like sheep into the midst of wolves. We know the disciples will not be

welcome everywhere they go. The same people who came after Jesus will come after the disciples. It is a time of faith that has a certain amount of anxiety with it.

We live in a similar time. It is a polarizing time of politics, religion, and race. It is a time when there is a lot of hostility, pain, anguish, and evil. Then we add a pandemic into the mix. We hold on to our faith in a time of anxiety. Like the disciples, God sends us into a chaotic world – but God gets it.

At the end of the great commission Jesus says, **[SLIDE] “Low I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** God is with us, and we continue to experience that in each other. The kingdom of heaven continues to come near.

In this chaotic time, God is always there to ‘reconstitute us.” God calls us to be a holy and a priestly people, and to continue God’s mission out into the world. It is not going to be easy, but WOW, Divinity has continued to carry the cross of Christ. I encourage all of us to continue Jesus’ ministry of preaching, teaching and healing. May God continue to strengthen you to work in the fields, where the harvest is great. I leave you today with something I have done before, and fits so well here today – the priestly benediction.

**[SLIDE] Numbers 6:24 - 26. “The Lord Bless you and Keep you; The Lord make his face shine upon you and to be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his favor upon you, and give you peace.”**

AMEN!