

5 Pentecost A—June 15, 2008
Romans 5:1-8
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Well, Canon Hap pretty much took us all to the woodshed last week for not eating our brussel sprouts. Calling us to task, as the confession says, not only for things done but primarily for things left undone: Poverty, Hypocrisy, Prejudice, Failing to care for the world which God has given us dominion over, Failing to care for each other. A list of shortcomings that is both long and convicting of our lack of steadfast faithfulness.

And I don't disagree with anything he said, but I see us struggling more as a body of Christ than I do as individuals seeking to serve Christ. It was Jesus himself who said, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few".

The harvest of evil and wrong in the world is plentiful. We live in a world of sound bites to the point where our own conversations with each other mirror the thirty seconds we may have to comprehend an earthquake or flood, or tornado. We live in a world where the rule of scarcity reigns supreme over the attitude of abundance. Is there really an oil shortage? Sandy went to the food bank the other day to pick up food for St. Georges and saw bin after bin of dry goods that will likely rot before being used.

Collectively we can look at each other in anguish and wring our hands in despair. But that does not make the harvest any less plentiful.

Jesus did not look at humanity as a group and empower them. He did not sweepingly wave his arm and say "Ya'll fix that." I am sure Jesus was a southerner.

He took his twelve disciples aside and gave them the power over unclean spirits and the power to cast them out. He took his twelve disciples aside and gave them the power to cure every disease and sickness.

And to make the point that it is each of us that make the difference Matthew calls them each by name. It wasn't "those guys" who can fix it. It wasn't "that group over there" that should be doing something. It wasn't some unseen, unknown, unidentified group whose attention or inattention to duty would make a difference.

It was; Simon also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee and his brother John; Philip and Bartholemew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Caananite Judas Ascariot, the one who betrayed him"

It was individuals, with specific names and families. It was individuals with parents and birthrights, family trees and lineage. It was imperfect human beings. Sometimes dense, and sometimes stubborn but all with specific names

to whom Jesus turned, to spread the Gospel throughout the world. It was people just like you and just like me, to whom Christ turned to save the world from unclean spirits, to cure every disease and sickness, of mind, body or spirit.

In this generation it is your name that is listed instead of the original twelve. The names have changed but other things have not. We are still being sent out like sheep into the midst of wolves. The names have changed but we are still called to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. We are as individuals called upon by name to make a difference in a world that seems to stay much the same.

When I first felt the call to ordained ministry I thought it was the craziest thing I ever thought of. I thought I must be nuts, and I kept it to myself for a long time. Until finally not being able to cast the thought away I sat down with Sandy and told her what my thoughts were. As if it were yesterday I remember her response, and it was, "I wondered when you were going to talk to me about this." I had dreaded that conversation for no good reason. Then some time later we took our children to dinner. Bolstered by her support and feeling pretty good about things it was time to tell the children. Matthew's immediate response, no pause, no thinking was, "Does this mean we are going to be poor?"

From deflation to elation to deflation. That is the call to ministry because the world is what the world is.

Then I told my Dad, who I think thought I was a little crazy, but he was supportive. Then I told my Mom who could only comment that Episcopalians use too many books. Up and down, up and down, up and down

But read this gospel again very slowly and very closely. That is exactly the way Jesus said it would be. But its not "those guys" Jesus calls to make a difference. It is each of us whom he calls by name.

And as each of us answers his call the world changes because there becomes one more heart purged from hatred, wiped clean of hypocrisy, erased of prejudice. Because if you answer Christ's call and realize that yes it is me he is talking to, yes it is you he is talking to: Bill, David, Harold, Mace, Nancy and on and on.

And if you answer Christ's call and truly enter into a relationship with the living Christ we cannot avoid the change that will come over us.

And each time that happens the world becomes a better place. The world will resist! The world resists change as much as the Episcopal church resists change. But when one of us answers the call of our name it is like a ripple in the sea of change, a ripple in the sea of peace, a ripple in the kingdom of God.

Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us"

Now that we have established that listen for your name. Because Christ has a ministry and a mission just for you. And it has your name on it.