

Epworth Chapel on the Green
June 18, 2017
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Exodus 19:1-8
Psalm 100
Romans 5:6-11
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Allow me to read a few verses from our Gospel lesson today from the contemporary translation entitled *The Message* by Eugene Peterson:

When he [Jesus] looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. "What a huge harvest!" He said to his disciples. "How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!" The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits, and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. (Mt. 9:36-10:1)

On first glance this reading seemed a little strange to me. Especially intriguing was the concept that Jesus tells the disciples to pray for workers, and that the prayer was immediately answered when Jesus called *them* to help him in his work.

But upon reflection, this should not strike us as strange. For when you look at the great needs in the world around you, and the needs of the people you see, and you pray and you ask God to do something about those needs, guess what? Chances are that *you* might be a big factor in God's answer to your prayer.

God is certainly capable of acting alone, and doesn't need our help. But I've learned that much of the time in life God answers our prayers by requiring *our*

involvement, *our* commitment, *our* participation. God often answers our prayers by requiring us to become active participants, to become part of the solution through our own involvement and effort.

In other words: the call, “Get on your knees” is often followed by the call, “Get up on your feet.” As the old proverb says: Don’t just curse the darkness; light a candle.”

Nearly half a century ago a man read this same Gospel text and sensed Jesus calling him to become actively involved. He was a southerner, and the bruised lives he saw all around him were in pain because of the racial segregation and division that was part of life in 1950’s America, and part of church life in 1950’s America.

So this man prayed, and then he took action. He joined together blacks and whites in Americus, Georgia, and started a cooperative farm there. It was called *Koinonia Farm*. It still exists today, just a few miles down the road from former President Jimmy Carter’s home.

Addressing the needs of his own day and time, this man translated into his own situation in the deep South what Jesus told his first disciples the first time he sent them out to carry out his work.

You may know of this man. His name was Clarence Jordan. Here is his *Cotton Patch Gospel* version of Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel text:

Jesus held a briefing session and sent out the twelve. "Don't go after the people of the world," he said, "and don't enter the black ghetto. Instead go to the deluded racists of the nation. As you travel, preach on the theme, THE GOD MOVEMENT IS HERE.

Now we know that Jesus was originally speaking of his fellow Jews, those whom he calls "the lost sheep of Israel." But Clarence Jordan understood that Jesus sends forth his disciples in every day and every age. And Clarence Jordan was living in deep South America, not first century Palestine.

It is also obvious to us that we are not Clarence Jordan. We live in Boise, Idaho, in a time where technology continues to radically change our lives. But the challenge that faced Jesus' disciples and Clarence Jordan also awaits us: *people whose lives are bruised and hurting, people who are traveling aimlessly through life with no purpose and direction, need to be told, "The Kingdom of God has come near."*

In the midst of great brokenness, we are summoned first to our knees to ask God to do what only *He* can do. And then we are summoned back to our feet in order to do what *we can* do -- to be agents of God's healing grace in the lives of hurting people.

You say, "Pastor, I'm no Clarence Jordan. What can I do?"

I'm not sure. But Jesus says, "Freely you have received; freely give." If you look at your life closely, chances are there are some areas where God has

freely given you a great deal. And all Jesus asks is that you give back, that you pass on what God has done in your life into the lives of others.

This is not first century Palestine. It's not 1950's America. Our time has changed. But the simple formula derived from this Gospel lesson still applies. In the midst of great need, Jesus calls us to do two things: *to fall on our knees and pray, and then to get back up on our feet and act.*

We often hear Jesus' words and receive them at the personal or individual level. But we should also hear them at the corporate level, for kingdom ministry is the task of the Church. It's an "us" proposition, not a "me" kind of thing.

And Jesus does not ask us to act on our own initiative or under our own power. He grants us the power and authority to minister in his Name.

As we come to the Table this morning, we do so with the awareness that the needs around us and within us are great. And so we pray that God will help us. But let us not forget that God may ask us *to play a special role* in how those prayers are answered. For while it's true that we are often summoned to our knees (to pray), the same voice that calls us to our knees also calls us to our feet, that we might take the grace we receive here at the Table to others.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.