

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 6**

**June 18, 2017**

**Matthew 9:35-10:8 / Romans 5:1-8**

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Sometimes it really is like the Nike ad says. You have to “just do it”. If you are or have been a driver, can you remember what it was like when you first learned how to drive? The first time I went driving in Carlisle with my high school driving instructor, we were coming up to a light at the intersection of North and Hanover streets, and he instructed me to follow the arrow so that I could make a left hand turn. For the life of me, I had no idea what he was talking about. I didn’t see any signs with arrows pointing left. He became a bit exasperated as we drew closer to the light and said, “On the road, look down at the arrow painted on the road and get in the left turn lane”. Well, obviously I had paid no attention to road signs when I was a passenger. Driving is definitely not one of those things you can learn by simply reading the driver’s manual.

When I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and Mr. Wenger, the elementary band instructor came to demonstrate band instruments that we could learn to play at school, I was mesmerized immediately by the sound of the trumpet. But I was not going to learn to play the trumpet by just watching or listening to my teacher or anyone else play. To learn to play a musical instrument, you have to take the bow, the horn, the bell, the keyboard, or the mallet in hand and be willing to make some kind of noise. Sometimes it’s not pleasant sounding. Those early squeaks and squawks can sound like animals. But practice does pave the way to potentially making music.

In learning how to do the work of a family therapist, there had to be some real live clients willing to have me work with them. There came a time when I had to set the books aside, take a deep breath, and dive in to get hands-on experience. In order to grow into the people God intends us to be, God beckons us, from our places of comfort and predictability, content in being observers of Jesus, to move into the wild and unpredictable life of disciples who join Jesus in life-giving ministry.

Today’s gospel reading from Matthew gives us a glimpse into Jesus’ mission of calling his twelve apprentices, leading them to take the plunge into doing the work of disciples, to become co-workers with him.

Jesus is on the move – going about all the cities and villages – teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of God’s kingdom, and healing sick folks. In his

travels and interactions with the crowds who gather, Jesus is moved with compassion for the people in their distress – “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”. Wandering, vulnerable, disconnected, and unprotected. In his heart and in his gut, according to the Greek word, Jesus is moved with compassion. He feels their pain and suffers with them.

Showing compassion requires exercising patience. It was not a whirlwind ten day, ten city mega-tour Jesus was on. He took the time to slow down and notice what was going on around him. Slow down to notice things deeper than what might appear on the surface. Jesus’ practice of prayer, the practice of communing with his Abba must have helped him become patient – patient with people, patient with God’s revealing his will and working for good. Jesus’ prayer life helped him trust that God would bring good things to life. Prayer enabled him to discern the presence of God’s life-giving Spirit in the midst of so much brokenness and bondage. Prayer enabled Jesus to let the divine Spirit constantly transform life – his own and the lives of those to whom he reached out. The discipline of prayer does that, doesn’t it? Makes us stop and listen, wait and look, taste and see, pay attention and be aware. Through prayer, the Spirit changes us.

There is real wisdom in how Jesus goes about his ministry. He does not try to meet all those cries for freedom, healing, reconciliation and connection on his own. That is a sure recipe for burnout. He tells the disciples to ask God for help, because there is so much kingdom work to be done, and few workers to help him. God’s mission was never intended to be done by Jesus all by himself. The disciples are to pray and ask “the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers”, because the harvest is so plentiful. Whether or not the twelve followers did as Jesus instructed them, the time comes for them as apprentices to take on the work of disciples, learning Jesus’ way of ministry through hands-on practice. *They* are the answer to Jesus’ prayer. So he gives them authority to liberate and heal, to cast out unclean spirits and to cure sickness and disease, and sends them out to “just do it”.

When Jesus is moved by compassion, it compels him to act, to take action for change. The movement of the heart is what creates the desire for change. Being moved by compassion is not only about bringing liberation and healing, freedom and comfort. Being moved by compassion includes confronting the forces that hold people back from living fully the lives God intends for them.

Compassionate action is always the work of the faith community. It is the community, people with a common call who can live out compassionate action over the long haul. Jesus is training a group of twelve. Twelve who learn together, who support and

sustain each other, and share the experience of being shaped and transformed by Jesus their teacher.

In the remainder of Matthew chapter ten, Jesus lays out for the twelve the work conditions of his ministry. He continues to prepare them for what this mission of God, this dream of God will be like. It will require that they travel lightly. They are not to fear the vulnerability of traveling with so little, unencumbered by things. They will need to be dependent on the hospitality of those to whom they go. And Jesus is up-front with them. They should expect resistance as they take up Jesus' ministry in acts of compassion and caring confrontation. Kingdom work is not simply about being "nice".

That move from apprentice to disciple calls for daring, determination, and dependence on God. Discipleship does not mean we turn to God when we can no longer function on our own. It means we recognize that we can do nothing at all on our own, but that God can do everything through us. As disciples we find not just some, but all of our strength, hope, courage and confidence in God.

So where do you find yourself today in this gospel story? Maybe you are one of those who is feeling harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd. You need direction and guidance for your life. Or maybe you need liberating from something that holds you captive. An addiction. Negative ways of thinking and acting which are fueled by fear. Held captive to ego needs and self-concern. Burdened by guilt over past mistakes. Nagged by worry and trapped in joyless living.

The systems of which we are a part also can hold us captive: workplace, family, school, church, community groups, government. Can you see forces at work in these systems from which collectively we need to be liberated? How often do we experience wariness, suspiciousness of the "stranger", the other? How often do we and the systems of which we are a part judge and exclude others based on appearances – wealth or lack of it, attractiveness, education, ability, race or ethnicity. Are there times when we become fixed on surviving in a form that is familiar and comfortable? How are we resisting change? Always with God there is abundant grace ready to release us and set us on a path to new life. Always there is the invitation to "let go and let God."

Healing is the other major mark of Jesus' ministry. Is there a place in your life where you are in need of the blessing of healing, health and wholeness? Maybe it is in a troubled relationship – with another person or with God. A struggle with emotional or mental distress. The challenge of physical or mental illness. Trying to cope with changes in physical or mental abilities in yourself, or in the life of a loved one. It hardly needs mentioning that in this day and time all the systems which affect our lives are in

deep need of deliverance, healing, restoration, and reconciliation. Always there is abundant grace with God to restore and heal, to bring health and wholeness .

God's heart is moved by compassion, whatever our need is. God cares. We can ask God for what we need because we know the One who is the source of love and life is already moving toward us. So in trust and with holy boldness, let us ask God for all that we need. And though it may seem daunting, as it must have been for those twelve apprentices stepping out to become disciples, we who have experienced Christ's liberating and life-giving love are the ones now called, empowered and sent to offer our hearts of compassion, for the sake of the world. Through God's power at work in us, we are equipped to do and dare acts that heal and make things new.

Our community and world need us to move from being apprentices, comfortable and content with watching Jesus, to disciples, who "just do it", give ourselves away in love alongside him. The harvest is plentiful. The opportunities to offer spiritual nourishment and support, to point to the goodness and nearness of God are abundant. The best place to start is with those closest to us – family, friends, neighbors, co-workers. "Go and proclaim the good news – the kingdom of heaven has come near." Liberation and healing are our tasks for ministry. God promises to equip us and will give us all the power we need to do these things. It's time to set aside the training manual, to go and just do it!