

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2020
Church of the Holy Cross
Dunn Loring, VA
Wade P. Hinkle

Matthew 10:40-42

Recognizing the Mission of Others

Good Morning. Welcome to Holy Cross' video streamed June 28 service.

So, maybe it's just me, but I have the impression that we Christians these days are spending a lot more time trying to discern *our own* individual call to mission. What God has called on us, each of us, to do. And that is indeed a good thing to do.

But this morning's Gospel reading raises an equally important question. How do we react when we encounter *others* answering *their* call to mission? Do we recognize and value those encounters, or do we find them frightening and unsettling?

This is not an abstract question. It touches directly, for example, on how we have experienced the anguish and outrage so many have expressed in the five weeks since George Taylor's death. It relates to the vital discussions that we are urged to begin on racism and injustice.

Today's Gospel reading in Matthew comes at the end of Chapter 10. But in thinking about the ideas of mission and ministry, it helps to have a bit of a larger context. That larger context is that *all* of Matthew Chapters 9 and 10 is about discerning a call to mission and what that means.

I think these two chapters, read together, help illustrate the two key concepts of mission and ministry.

First, what are we being asked to do?

And second, how should we go about doing it?

In Matthew Chapter 9, Jesus begins to gather and inspire disciples as he teaches and performs miracles. At the end of Chapter 9, he begins to explain why. The "Lord of the harvest" wants to "send out laborers to the harvest."¹

The initial group of missionaries will be the Twelve Apostles, and Jesus then spends most of Matthew Chapter 10 explaining to them in detail what the Apostles are to do.

Verse 7 has the succinct summary: "As you go, proclaim the good news."² In other words, help others understand, and reach toward, the saving grace of God.

Here is the answer to the first question. The purpose of mission, the purpose of ministry, is to help *others* deepen their relationship with God, in part by living as God intends.

And as for the second question - how should each of us do this, how can we each help? - the Apostles get a leg up that is not available to you or me today. Jesus spends all of Matthew

¹ Mat 9:38.

² Mat 10:7.

Chapter 10 explaining to the Apostles exactly how they should do it. There is no ambiguity about what they are being called to do. Although Jesus makes clear that the job will be hard and the working conditions sometimes onerous.

Two thousand years later, it is not so easy for many of *us* to understand how God intends for us to answer our call to mission and ministry. The world is a broken place, and we are surrounded by so much behavior and misery that make God sad.

So in one sense, it is encouraging in contemporary Christianity, and especially in the Episcopal Church, that there is increasing emphasis on the need for each of us to think deeply about our individual call to mission and ministry. To think prayerfully and carefully about how we are being called to serve.

Want proof we are thinking about this more and more? I just Googled “call to Christian mission” and got 48,000 specific hits. Without the quotation marks but requiring all words to be present returned 225 *million* hits. We are obviously thinking about this a lot.

But, especially in the past few months, I am wondering if our emphasis on our individual call to our own mission is getting in the way understanding that we are *all* called to mission. And maybe other people are also awakening to that call. And acting on it.

So it follows that all of the people who have accepted a call to mission are trying to help *us*. You and me. And yet so often we fail to understand that, and instead question their motivations and are suspicious of their messages.

A tendency to focus inwardly, to think of oneself first, and to react to the outside world from that perspective, is only human nature. Christian theologians have always known this. Our egos still get in the way, even the modern era of enlightenment and critical reasoning. As C. S. Lewis wrote, pride - self-centeredness - “is the essential vice.”³

Jesus understood this aspect of human nature. Indeed, earlier in Matthew Chapter 10, he told the Apostles to expect it. Not everyone would listen to the good news. He said to them, “Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave...”⁴

But Jesus, because he knew our hard hearts, knew that the Apostles would need help in urging His people to open their ears to the good news from the Apostles.

So, Jesus taught to the Apostles and us later-day missionaries as well, the understanding that we read in today’s Gospel passage. “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous.”⁵ And this teaching of Jesus still applies to us today.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster Touchstone, 1996), 109.

⁴ Mat 10:11-14.

⁵ Mat 10:40-41.

You see, Jesus knew that even today, the message and witness of his sent ministers might be ignored, disregarded. That his missionaries might be derided as “radicals,” “anarchists,” fear-mongers,” “selfish snobs,” “elitists,” with some nefarious reason for pointing out that we are not living as God intended.

And so, Jesus offered the Apostles the perfect response when skeptics ask: Why are people telling us, you and me, so many unpleasant truths?

Answer: Because God and Jesus asked them to.

Question: Why do others protest racial hatred and violence, why are people protesting, and asking for support?

Answer: Because Jesus said to.

Question: Why are others reminding us of the need to wear masks, practice social distancing, and take other health precautions?

Answer: They are trying to help us because Jesus said to.

When others make us aware of injustice, of the need to love our neighbors as ourselves,...we need to pay attention to whom we are hearing from... That’s the message in today’s reading, and it is one we really need to hear in this time of trouble.

I’m going to close by reading part of the passage again, this time not from the NRSV but from the version called *The Message*:⁶

Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God’s messenger.⁷

Amen.

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (NavPress (February 1, 2014).

⁷ Mat 10:40-41 (*The Message*).