**St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church**

**The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 9**

[**2 Kings 5:1-14**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp9_RCL.html#ot1)[**Psalm 30**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp9_RCL.html#ps1)[**Galatians 6:(1-6)7-16**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp9_RCL.html#nt1)[**Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**](https://lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Pentecost/CProp9_RCL.html#gsp1)

**Into the Unknown**

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

If you have ever had the privilege of glancing through the pages of a well-worn Bible, you are very likely to find a little bookmark which leads you to this chapter and verse, or you will find the verses underlined in ink, or the page will just naturally open there, as it has countless times before. Known as the Great Commission at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, it reveals Jesus sending the twelve out in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to do God’s work in the way they had been taught.

Last week we learned that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, teaching us to continually move forward, keeping our eye set on our destination, warning us not to look back over our shoulders, lest we veer off course.

Having learned that lesson, we too are being sent forth and this week we not only set our faces toward whatever is our own Jerusalem, we are being taught that we need to know just where it is and why it is we are going there. Perhaps, now it is our turn, too, to mark Luke’s Gospel in the same way that we often find Matthew’s Great Commission. The Gospels differ in writing, but are the same in intent. This is Jesus’ message to all his faithful followers, whether in the first century or today.

The message isn’t meant just for twelve disciples as it has in the past. Now it is meant for many. Sending out of seventy implies sending out all the faithful of all nations of the world or all of humanity. Thus, now it is that the directive for mission comes directly into the life of Christ’s Church today, here into the heart of all we do here at St. Aidan’s, during this time we call Pentecost, or Ordinary time. It is the season when the work of the Church is carried out in earnest, with the same eagerness shown by those that were sent out into Samaria by Jesus, Himself.

The message the seventy set out to carry into the world that day, hasn’t changed. No matter who or where one is in the world, the Gospel message holds the power to be life-changing and knows no national or political boundaries. It holds meaning in any language, offered by diverse voices to diverse ears, all centered on one central message of hope to all, in the name of Jesus Christ.

No wonder the apostles were eager to set out themselves to spread the word. No wonder they felt a sense of urgency to find more laborers for the plentiful harvest. God knows, and has known from the beginning of time, there will be far more to be harvested in the Kingdom of God than there are laborers to harvest it.

It is a different perspective than that of earthly endeavor which sees life through Godly lens rather than that of humankind and it seems difficult for us to know how to get started and to understand just what the word “harvest” implies for us in the 12st century. The word seems to imply a kind of benign passivity on the part of those yet to willingly and openly enter into the mystery of faithful discipleship. From a heavenly perspective, however, harvest and harvesting is metaphoric, raising us the aspect of being in a state of full maturity, ripe and ready for being gathered into the kingdom of God.

It is into this harvest that we journey forward into the unknown. Into an unseen harvest, ripe and ready to be gathered in and once gathered, belonging; once belonging, knowing grace and unending hope in the love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a reward to reap now on earth, and what a reward to reap in the time to come in heaven, not only for ourselves, but for all those brought out of the lonely fields and not the community of God.

The mission, then and now, is made clear. Until now, according to Luke, Jesus has been ministering on his own. He has healed, taught and performed miracles throughout Luke’s Gospel and now he is authorizing his disciples to do the same work in his name. At first, it was the twelve who moved ahead of him, paving the way for his arrival. Now he commissions seventy others in the same way. We will learn more of their experiences in Luke’s second book, The Acts of the Apostles. They are to be nothing less than the voice of Jesus, heard through teaching, preaching, offering healing words and comforting presence. One would think such a message would be welcome to all with ears to hear it, and yet Jesus warns, not all ears will be willing to hear and could well be hostile. In short, to spread the Good News is not as easy as it sounds, but it is when the time comes to undertake the work of mission that we set our faces toward the goal and move resolutely forward.

Nevertheless, like every good leader, Jesus has prepared his followers to take the lead for expanding his mission. Jesus doesn’t do the work the Apostles are capable of doing themselves so that they become confident with deepened understanding of how Jesus can heal brokenness, restore and transform lives. While there is no one way to accomplish this sacred ministry which is passed along from the twelve to the seventy and to all humanity which includes you and me, there is a consistent and unchanging core to the message which we need to understand in order to undertake this mission with which we have been entrusted.

One part of the unchanging truth of our mission is to understand that the harvest is just as plentiful today as it was in Jesus’ time. We think because we live in Portland, Oregon, we have less harvest within which we can accomplish our work than does the Church in other areas of the country. That was true and to some extent, Oregon is still one of the West Coast states with the most Nones, those non-affiliated with any church or religion. Yet, California has seen an increase in church membership since, and in the year 2000 the state counted a higher percentage of church members than many states in the Midwest and Northeast, indicating a significant shift in the presence of the faithful. Even so, a Gallup poll comparing belief in God among areas of the United States as recently as 2008 indicated that only 59% of Western U.S. residents believe in God, compared to 80% in the East, 83% in the Midwest and 86% in the South.

If Jesus were to read the statistics, he would probably wonder what we in Oregon and Washington have been doing with our time in this place where the harvest is plentiful but apparently, the laborers are few! Jesus would only see that we live in a place of abundance rather than scarcity, not because he viewed the world through rose-colored glasses, but because he was passionate about the message he was sent by God to deliver. Jesus did not send out his apostles or commission the seventy to prepare a harvest, but to gather it in and to pray that other laborers will be found to assist in this work that is so very vital to God. God has prepared the harvest and it is ours now to view it from the perspective of our current state of events and affairs, through the lens of our current socio/political realities, and to plan, coordinate and envision how to work within in such a way that invites growth rather than curtails it, and to find ways to invite others to join us in the work.

Another aspect of mission is to understand that we are indeed vulnerable as were all those before us, as Jesus warned the seventy. He told them in no uncertain terms that they would not be received everywhere they went, sending them “like lambs into the midst of wolves.” Yet, Jesus isn’t interested in us wasting time trying to convince those who are not open to hearing a message of hope. Rather, he says, move on. Bless those who receive you and as for any who are too closed to hearing from you, go on by without judgement. For all those who value peace and welcome peace, receive God’s peace, and all those who do not must wait to find it.

When you find those who are open to receiving you and want to support you and join in the work of mission, stay with them. Be dependent on their support. Don’t try to go it alone. Be glad of their sustenance and receive it as they have received you. In a way, we allow others to show the same hospitality that we offer to them as an act of unity of purpose and, perhaps, unspoken understanding.

Just as the disciples and apostles learned when they ventured out armed with Jesus’ message, we too learn that our words often have far greater significance than we understand at the time. We don’t know when and how our words will impact another: what they heard or how they interpreted what we had to say. What word or phrase holds deep meaning and importance for someone to whom we have spoken about our faith, to the extent that the person receiving them found their way into God’s Church and their own journey of faith? We can never know who, where or how such acceptance is felt, but we can be glad to know that it occurs.

What we do know is that when we passionately and faithfully carry the Good News into the world through our words, our actions, our invitations and our affirmations, we are announcing and proclaiming the Kingdom of God, challenging and renouncing all that is evil in the world, thereby firmly replacing hopelessness with hope, despondency with joy and inaction with action for the work of labor in God’s harvest. How can such a message not have impact.

Most significant for us to ponder, perhaps, is the authority Jesus has given to us “..over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”(vv.19-20).

Jesus isn’t exactly promising more diamonds in our crowns when we bring others into the understanding of God’s Kingdom, but he is differentiating between earthly and spiritual success. Our rewards for doing God’s work is the deep and profound relationship we establish with our God as a result. Our relationship with God is different than any other on earth. It is a relationship built on heavenly grace. As willing laborers in the fields of God’s Kingdom, we are not only messengers of God’s mercy and grace, but also recipients of the same.

And so we travel on, carrying little but our faith, setting our faces toward Jerusalem, called to impart all that we have experienced through the mercy of God. We carry no purse with which to accumulate riches or worldly rewards. We carry only our courage and freedom to be vulnerable, filled with confidence that no matter what befalls us along the way, with no need of violent response to the rejection of others, knowing that God is with us and our place in God’s Kingdom is assured. Our purpose is only to prepare people to experience Jesus, peacefully, without confrontation and with gratitude, presence and exchange.

It is our journey into the unknown, and in the company of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not bound by what has been, or has not been, acceptable in the world or what is, or is not, acceptable in our present. We are not setting out to fix brokenness, but rather to embrace the possible. Our focus is not one of hostility, judgement or fear, but rather an invitation to a world that is not bound by political or social divides, but with the fundamental truth that we are all here on this earth at this moment to face whatever it is we must face together. Chaos is not new, but a sign of evolving creation. It is not ours to control but ours to allow as the precursor of growth.

Thus, it is our journey is to prepare the way for Christ. It is holy work, filled with increasing opportunity to address the wounds of the world in a way that has been true since the beginning of time is just as relevant and true today. It pays us well, with inner joy, outward love and unceasing faith in God’s kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord. Perhaps we should call our mission the “Wound no more” movement, for to wound others is to wound our world and each other. Perhaps, we can create a new path for a new journey, a different approach filled with playful acceptance and tolerance for those who are not yet ready to listen. Perhaps, the unknown journey into which we are invited is to simply carry the age old message of love into a world that is continually changing, with different language, different perspectives, different needs, different challenges but is longing for the message that never changes, and never fails to fulfill, even more than ever before.

Amen

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

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1. Matthew 28: 16-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)