

## **“Proclaim—It’s More Than Words”**

### **Sermon – June 14, 2020 Stone Presbyterian Church**

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Picture a person in Texas wearing a large, fancy ten-gallon hat and bragging how big his spread is and how important he is. But in reality, has nothing. Full of big talk but little to show for it.

They call a person like that, “All hat and no cattle.”

I think I’ve used the idiom in a sermon sometime in the past, but it seemed à propos to reuse, given today’s lectionary.

In today’s passage from Matthew 9 starts with verse 35, “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

You could say that Jesus was an “evangelist”, which literally means in Greek a “bringer of good news.”

And, indeed, Jesus is “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.” But he does more than that. He also is teaching and curing (healing).

We then hear in the immediately following verse, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.” He had compassion for them.

That is the context of Jesus mission. Yes, he is proclaiming the good news, but not as preaching down to people. Rather as way of reaching down to people.

The good news is that God loves them and has compassion particularly for those in need and at the margins of society.

But saying that without action is “all hat and no cattle.” Jesus couples his proclaiming with teaching and healing. Teaching so people can understand and think for themselves and healing because it is hard for people to hear the good news when they are in pain.

And Jesus knows he can’t do it alone, so he enlists some help and summons twelve disciples.

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Each of the gospels name the disciples in quite different settings. In Mark Jesus goes up a mountain, calls the disciples, and then he goes home. In Luke Jesus and a bunch of disciples go to a mountain, he prays, chooses twelve out of them, and then comes down the mountain and gives the Sermon on the Plain.

In today’s passage from Matthew, though, Jesus is completely engaged in fulfilling his Father's mission—proclaiming, teaching, healing—when he chooses twelve disciples and immediately inducts them into the same vocation!

He tells them to “proclaim the good news” and, like him, couple it with action. Nothing big for their first time out—just “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons”. Oh, and do it without payment, which would take away from the glorification of God, from the free grace of God.

When I write out the script for worship, including various rituals we call that the “liturgy”. Simple put, liturgy means ritual with a purpose. The purpose of liturgy is to lead people to God and one another. But that takes more than just ritual.

The roots of liturgy are deeper. It comes from the Greek word, *leitourgía*, with *leit* meaning “people” and *ourgia* mean work”, so liturgia is the public work of the people done on behalf of the people.

So to lead people to God and one another requires work, specifically doing for others and not for your own reward. It means coupling proclaiming with doing. Word and deed. You cannot have one without the other.

Last week on Trinity Sunday we heard from the end of Matthew where Jesus commands the disciples to go and “make disciples of all

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peoples”, but in today’s passage near the beginning of Jesus ministry, he tells the disciples to “go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

In other words, go to those who should already know the message, but have lost their way before we go out to the world at large. This seems to be a message for our time as well for while there are many people unaffiliated with any religion that we do try and reach out to, there are also many fellow Christians who seem to have lost their way and have gotten stuck on rigid rules that they refuse to change and angrily insist on preaching down instead of reaching down.

Jesus gave the Twelve clear instructions: proclaim and do. But after that they are on their own. They must decide whether to stay in certain cities or move along. They must think for themselves.

Instructions only take us so far. The faithful church must move beyond Jesus himself, as the disciples do. Yet many Christians—and too many churches—want direct instructions for every issue. The Bible is not an instruction manual for each and every little thing; that is the very thing Jesus criticized the scribes and Pharisees for.

Instead, we should ask how does the Bible may inform our vision of a just society? Should not compassion frame our mission, just as it did for Jesus? For where there is healing and liberation that is where the realm of heaven is breaking out.

For as our epistle lesson from Romans 5 says “since we are justified (made right) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And “we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” But

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that boast is not bragging; it is because of what Christ did for us that we are humbled and can express that confidence of hope.

So, we go out to proclaim that hope and help to heal others, including fellow Christians, because as today’s passage concludes, “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”

In some ways it’s easy to picture sacrificing yourself for the abstract good, but not as much for concrete examples. To get a feel for that kind of sacrifice, imagine, depending on your politics, giving up your life for Donald Trump or Nancy Pelosi?

Because as Linus once said to his sister Lucy in the Peanuts comic strip, “I love mankind...it’s people I can’t stand.”

But that is what we are called as disciples of Christ to do. Not to see abstract or stereotype groups, but to see flesh and blood people, to have compassion both for those who hate and for those who suffer and we proclaim the good news and help to heal, not hurt.

And we do this with the peace of God we have in our hearts and with confidence of hope because as Paul says in verse 5, “and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

May we let the Spirit work through us to show God’s love to others in word and deed.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.  
Amen.