

Sermon Pentecost 4C  
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I admit, I have taken them for granted in the past. Overlooked them, brushed aside them, even thrown them straight into the trash. But after seeing a recent video that showed how radishes are harvested laboriously by hand, I vow never to look at a radish the same way again!

In this country, we typically view radishes as a garnish, or just there to add color, but before they ended up cut into the shape of a rose on the side of our plate, each one of those little bulbous root vegetables was painstakingly plucked from the soil, bundled, washed and packaged by hand. The farm workers I saw in the video were hunched down over the tiny plants, kneeling in jeans and long-sleeves under the hot sun, with their hoodies pulled up over their heads to keep their necks covered, but still managing to pick with a speed that made my head spin.

Each season, you only have a certain amount of time to harvest any given crop before they begin to wilt, rot or harden. And many farmers report that lately, they often don't have enough laborers to complete the harvest before it's too late. One farmer I saw interviewed about the farm labor shortage said he had to let up to 20% of his crop die in the ground, because he just couldn't find enough hands to pick it. It's difficult to find folks willing to commit to that kind of work.

I get it! Especially after spending a little time watching footage of farm workers I can totally understand why it would be hard to get enough people to do that. The work is intense, the sun is relentless, and the pay is not great. I guarantee you I would not last one day in the fields.

In our Gospel Reading today from Luke, we hear Jesus say to those who will go out and spread the good news: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." As Jesus told the disciples before in his parables, God's harvest is coming. Wherever the Word of God is sown in good soil, the fruits of the harvest will appear, and will produce a hundredfold!

There are hearts ready to receive God's Word, to welcome the good news of Grace, to turn to following Jesus, to devote their lives to the work of the kingdom, but first, the Lord must send laborers into the harvest. And not many will go. Not many will be willing to enter in to God's fields. Not many will have the courage to go out on faith, the strength to trust that God will provide, the humility to take on the yoke of the Master and do the work of the Lord.

But this is what disciples are called, equipped and sent to do. In Holy Baptism, we are called to, as the baptismal liturgy says, "trust God, and proclaim Christ through word and deed." Through the Word of God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are equipped with everything we need to take God's message out. And at the table of Grace we are fed with the body and blood of the Christ we proclaim, and sent out to take the message of Christ to those who need to hear.

We read in the Gospel today that when Jesus sends out the Seventy, he doesn't send them with much: "No purse, no bag, no sandals," he says. But he does send them with a few key things: First, he sends them with one another - they will not be alone, but will have partners in Christ. And second, he sends them with the promise of welcome and provision. Jesus says don't worry about packing everything you \*think\* you'll need. He says don't bounce around from house to house, looking for the fluffiest pillows or the best food and drink. He says just go, and trust that God will provide.

He says you will be welcomed. Not everywhere, but you will be received by some. The peace you bring will be shared - not by all, but you might be surprised. He says you will be provided for. You will be fed and nourished by those who will open their homes & their hearts to you and to my presence. "For anyone who welcome you welcome me and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." (Mk 10)

But there's one more surprise that Jesus has in store for his followers that he doesn't prepare them for. He doesn't tell them about the overflowing joy they'll bring back with them upon their return. Jesus told them that they would be received by others, but they had no idea that they in turn would receive the joy they'd be bubbling over with when they return back from their witness: "We did it, Jesus! We shared your Word with the people, and they listened! And some have come back to join us! We went and healed people who were sick and suffering!" "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" "Wow! What a feeling!" What they received, in addition to the food and lodging they'd been promised, was the unexpected return blessing that comes with doing the work of the kingdom from letting go, and letting God work his purposes in you.

Last week Pastor Kris mentioned the joy-filled week we had the privilege to share with our Confirmation students at Kairos Camp up at Lutheridge. One of the activities the youth participated in was the opportunity to write down questions for the pastors to answer (anonymously) with the whole group. We called it "Cross-Examination." As we looked through these questions, we noticed a theme that appeared in our students' inquiries, as well as in our own "Ask the Pastor" series we began here a few weeks ago. Many of the questions began with the words: "How do I tell a friend...?" Or "How do I talk to a friend about...?"

We know that as disciples, we are called, equipped & sent by Christ to proclaim the good news, but we don't always know how. We want to be a witness to the good things God has done, is doing and will do in our lives through Jesus, but in today's world, where nobody seems to want to be preached to or proselytized while they're going about their day to day, how do we heed Christ's Great Commission?

Well, let's take a closer look at exactly how Jesus instructed the seventy. First, Jesus says, you are to enter each house with a word of Peace. Jesus doesn't send them out with a word of judgment, or of condemnation, but of peace.

The very first step toward sharing the Love of Christ is entering into any and all situations with the Peace of Christ. And remember, the Peace of Christ is not the peace of the world. The peace of Christ can exist even when someone is grieving, when someone is anxious, when a loved one is sick, when a family is facing homelessness. The peace of Christ is not dependent on the situation around it. The peace of Christ exists within the heart. And it will open doors. When someone is lonely, when someone is hurting, when someone needs to hear the good news of Grace, Peace will pave the way.

That always seems to be what I notice about someone whose faith exudes from them and is so easily shared with everyone: that peace. There are some people of faith whose very presence can just give you a spiritual uplift, a spiritual contact-high (if you will) because you can just feel that pervasive sense of peace that they carry in and with them. You don't have to be "worry-free" to have the Peace of God, that the Apostle Paul says passes all understanding... You don't have to be the "perfect disciple" to possess it.... You simply have to invite the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, and trust that God's got you.

The second instruction Jesus gives to his disciples is that when they go in, they are to cure the sick. Enter with peace, Jesus says, and then go straight to the ailing. Find the broken, the mourning, the hurting, and to them, bring healing.

Now, not many of us may be in the practice of performing healing miracles, or have the medical training needed to cure illnesses, but we all have the gift of healing. Each of us can go to someone who is sick, imprisoned, or in pain, and bring healing and wholeness in the name of Christ. (Yes, it is possible that God will provide physical healing through our ministry...) But regardless, we are always called to bring spiritual healing. If we follow the call to go and bring the Good News of Christ, we must always first go to where there is brokenness and speak God's healing there.

When we talk about God's wholeness for a broken and hurting world, I love to come back to the word Shalom. Shalom was the common Hebrew greeting of peace. But, in fact, it means both Peace and Wholeness. To be bringers of God's Shalom means to bring both peace of mind as well as the healing and wholeness that comes with knowing a Loving God.

"Cure the Sick," Jesus says. "Heal the Suffering." Sounds intimidating, but in practice, it may just look like simply acknowledging, "It sounds like you're having a hard time right now." Or, "How have you been doing since your job change?" Or it may look like making that hospital visit or making a phone call to someone who's recovering. The first step toward spiritual healing can come through just letting someone know that you see their pain, and that they are not alone.

Then the third instruction Jesus gives his followers is to deliver the message: "The kingdom of God has come near to you." That message is just as relevant and needful today as it was two thousand years ago, but if you just went up to somebody and said to them "The Kingdom of God has come near," you may not get the kind of response you're looking for. The core of that message is still the central tenet of our Christian proclamation, But how could we get that across in a way that someone today might more easily understand?

What does it mean, “The kingdom of God has come near to you”? It means that God reigns. It means God’s got you. It means God is in charge, not all the other things that try to convince you they are: not status, wealth or health (or a lack thereof). It means that whatever you’re dealing with, Whatever situation you’re in, Whatever is going on - good or bad - God is already here, already with you, already working to bring good, even if you can’t always see it.

So what could you say to someone in order to get that message across? You could say, “I believe God is already here with you.” Or “I believe God is going to take care of you.” Or even, “I know when I’m going through something like this, it really helps to pray and trust that what I can’t handle, God can.” Sharing the Word of God with someone is not about memorizing a pat formula, it’s about showing up, bringing peace, meeting someone in their brokenness, and leaving them with a word of Grace.

Then, Jesus tells his disciples, if they do not receive you, shake it off. Literally shake the dust off your feet and leave it behind you. Don’t let the false starts and dead ends weigh you down. As Pastor Kris likes to say: We don’t lament the things we cannot do; We rejoice in the things we can.” Even Jesus acknowledges that you won’t change every life you come in contact with, and that’s OK. Just do what you can, be faithful living out your calling, and leave the rest up to God.

Today we hear that we have a job to do. There’s a plentiful harvest bursting forth from the fertile soil around us, and now is the time to get to work. As we go out to boldly answer that call, let’s remember that we are not only sent, we are also equipped. We are equipped with one another, equipped with the promise that God will provide, and rewarded with the joy that comes with stepping out in faith to share the love of Christ with others.

So whether your work clothes are suit and tie, Shorts and a t-shirt, or blue jeans and a hoodie, suit up and get going! “For the harvest is plentiful,” Jesus says, and the laborers are YOU.