

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 52:7-8
SECOND LESSON: Matthew 9:35-10:23
June 14, 2020

“Three Essential Things”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

A grandfather asked his twin granddaughters what they wanted for their birthdays.

“Give us a world!” they responded. It took him awhile to figure out that what they were asking for was a globe. So, Granddad happily shopped for a nice large, spinning globe that he was sure they would love.

He waited for their delight as they unwrapped the beautiful globe he had selected. He sensed, however, that their enthusiasm for the gift was not as heart-felt as he had expected. “What’s the matter?” he asked. “I thought this was what you wanted.”

“Well, yes,” said one of them, “but we were kind of hoping for a lighted world.” Immediately he understood that what they wanted was a globe with a light inside.

“I can fix that,” he said. “Let me take it back and exchange it for a lighted one.” Unfortunately, the store where he bought it did not sell lighted ones. They refunded his money and he set out in search of a “lighted world.” He eventually located a globe with a light in it, bought it and presented it to his delighted granddaughters.

When asked by a friend if he had learned anything from this experience, he made one sage observation: “Oh, yes,” he said, “I learned that a lighted world costs a lot more.”

Light is a powerful metaphor. An enlightened world where all are treated justly is what we want, but it will cost more.

Prejudice in the 1st century was ethnic in nature, not racial, or at least not based on skin color. The Jews hated the Samaritans. The Samaritans returned the favor. Anti-Semitism was widespread throughout the Roman Empire because the Jews refused to assimilate. Greeks looked down on the Romans as upstarts. Romans considered themselves superior to everyone. Those from Crete were reputed to all be liars. Within Israel people said, “can anything good come out of Nazareth?” And the word “barbarian” was originally an ethnic slur against Europeans. The Romans made fun of their speech saying it had a “barbar” sound. National and ethnic bias is an ugly fact of human nature. But the people Jesus addressed on this occasion were rendered powerless not because of race or nationality, **but because of class.**

The helpless and voiceless crowd Jesus had compassion on were poor. And because they were poor, they were largely uneducated. Because they were

poor, they were trapped in a daily grind of survival. Because they were poor, they worked long and hard hours every day, only to have their meagre earnings stripped from them by unscrupulous tax collectors. Because they were poor the courts always ruled against them. Plundered at every turn and helpless to defend themselves they were despised even by the religious elite, because they didn't have the luxury of keeping the law to the standards that the rich kept the law. Jesus was moved with compassion for the poor who came to him, and so he sent help. He sent his first disciples, and he gave them daunting instructions. He said, "As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

If it had been me I would have stopped right there and said, "*WHAT?*" *Heal the sick? Raise the dead? Cleanse lepers and drive out demons? Do you have any other impossible things you would you like to add to that list?*"

And then, as if that weren't challenging enough, Jesus added further instructions. They were to take absolutely NOTHING with them. No money, no begging bag for contributions to the cause, no spare clothes and NO STAFF, so they couldn't even physically defend themselves. They were to rely wholly on the hospitality of others, which at that time was not as strange as it would be today. There were no hotels, so it was expected that any person with reasonable means would take in travelers and offer hospitality. And the disciples were not to feel guilty about receiving this food and shelter from others, because the worker deserves his keep. Part of the social contract of the day meant that laborers were often paid not just in money, but in meals and lodging. These disciples were working for God and God promised to uphold God's part of the deal.

There were some additional interesting aspects to the instructions that followed. Upon entering a home, the disciples were told to let their peace rest on it. If the home was deserving that peace would remain. If not, it would return to them. Not everyone will respond with an open heart. There will be rejection and opposition. If that happened, the disciples were told to leave that home or town and shake the dust off their feet. Jews at the time had a practice of shaking off Gentile dust from their feet when returning to Israel, as if even the dirt were ritually unclean. Jesus was giving them a way to not take the rejection personally and move on. There was simply too much to do to waste time hammering away at a closed door. And he concluded, it will be "more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town," providing us with God's understanding of the real sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is the gross violation of hospitality—of attacking rather than welcoming guests.

Our reading today ends with, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." I've always been rather fond of this verse. It means that being naïve is not a requirement for a Christian. We have brains. We're supposed to use them. We are supposed to think things through and be prepared for eventualities, while at the same time trusting God. To be "innocent as doves" means that we don't fall to the level of our enemies. We don't adopt unworthy tactics. We don't

deceive and manipulate. If our emails were released to the public no one should be scandalized. Impressed or bored maybe, but not scandalized!

What can we learn from this scripture today? Three essential things. First, God's ministry to the poor and oppressed is multi-faceted. It is quality of life and gospel message together, not one or the other. We don't live in the same culture or share the same worldview as those of the 1st century, but the needs are the same. While I haven't seen anyone raise the dead, what happens in ICUs is often pretty close. This pandemic must be taken seriously. Gun violence, gangs and police brutality also need to be addressed. Dumping trash and releasing pollutants into poor neighborhoods must be stopped. And no matter how it is accomplished, and politicians can argue till the cows come home, we need to heal the sick. Health care should be provided to everyone, not just the rich. The lepers of today are those who have been cast out of society and rejected. The LGBTQ and trans community fit that bill pretty well. So do people who have been in prison and need a second chance. And as far as demons are concerned, while I do believe in a spiritual form of evil that is demonic, how many people do we know struggling with the demons of alcoholism, drug addiction, PTSD or mental illness? Some of our Veterans battle all of them. God's mission concerns ALL of life. It is not limited to the preaching of a message of salvation. We must do more than tell people about Christ. We must be his hands and feet.

The second essential point of this text is that we need to trust God completely in order to do God's work. Sending the disciples out with nothing was a training exercise, not a requirement. But the message is the same. The job is HUGE. We can't do it on our own. The power that is needed is supernatural. It is God's power, not ours. Right now, we are in need of great social change and awakening, and the power that can make that happen is the Holy Spirit. People of faith have been behind every successful reform movement in this nation. We must act, but we must act with God's guidance and power.

And finally—God does not want us to throw out our brains. Why is it that people think Christians have to be naïve? Planning and strategizing about the best way to accomplish something is what God expects us to do. The problem with us is we forget God and rely solely on our own brains, and our brains and insights are limited. We have to seek God for wisdom and guidance **first**. But God did give us brains and does expect us to use them. Amen.

Isaiah 52:7-8

6 Therefore my people will know my name;
therefore in that day they will know
that it is I who foretold it.

Yes, it is I.”

7 How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,

who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”
8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion,
they will see it with their own eyes.

Matthew 9:35-10:23

35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. **36** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. **37** Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. **38** Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. **2** These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; **3** Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; **4** Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. **5** These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. **6** Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. **7** As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ **8** Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. **9** “Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— **10** no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. **11** Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. **12** As you enter the home, give it your greeting. **13** If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. **14** If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. **15** Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. **16** “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.