



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, June 18, 2017

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May I speak to you in the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love between them. Amen.

Our gospel today proclaims, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” What does it mean to be one of the laborers that Jesus is asking for? How can we, like the disciples, proclaim the nearness of the Kingdom of heaven?

The authority that Jesus gives to His disciples is rattled off in a deceptively easy laundry list – To cast out unclean spirits, and to cure every disease and every sickness. I don’t know about you, but this authority seems pretty hard to lay claim to in my everyday life. The idea of an unclean spirit, or a demon, is not very familiar to me. In fact, the only images that come to mind are Hollywood-style horror movies, with exorcisms and contorted bodies.

But when I think about it, unclean spirits are probably hidden in plain sight.

- Selfishness is an unclean spirit.
- Arrogance is an unclean spirit.
- Meanness is an unclean spirit.

Jesus is giving each of us the authority to cast these things out – of ourselves, of one another, and of the world. Selfishness can be cast out with a spirit of generosity. Often, when I am unable to see beyond myself, it is related to an inflated sense of self – an arrogance about how big and important my problems are. I can become blind to those around me – blind even to the beauty in the world – because I am so focused on myself. That unclean spirit needs to be cast out of me. Sometimes, it is through prayer. Because in recognizing the bigness and majesty of God, I am reminded of how small I am, and I gain perspective. Sometimes, it is through someone else’s act of kindness. Because in someone treating me better than I may deserve, I am reminded of the privilege and responsibility I have to love others. Jesus is giving us permission, authority, and encouragement to do the work of casting out unclean spirits like this.

The next authority Jesus gives is to cure every disease and every sickness. Last summer, I worked in Queens Hospital, as a chaplain. I was painfully aware, in each interaction I had, that I didn’t have a medical degree and I couldn’t cure anyone.



Pentecost 2 – June 18, 2017, cont'd

I would listen to my patients as they described various aches and pains, and I would feel so helpless – so useless to them. I couldn't prescribe any medicine, or guarantee a good outcome. Midway through the summer, as I was at church one Sunday, there was a reading from second Kings about healing.

Because of my summer job, and the difficulty I was having in the hospital environment, my ears perked up. I started to think about healing, and what it means. I had to move away from the idea that healing means living longer, or avoiding death – after all, death is an inevitability of life. Perhaps healing is actually about finding peace and comfort regardless of the statistics on your chart, or your test results. Maybe healing is about finding and feeling God's presence even through the storm. So perhaps when Jesus is here asking us, as disciples, to cure disease and sickness; He is asking us to be present to one another, to pray; to bring food; to write cards; to visit –Perhaps that is the cure.

Jesus tells us, the harvest is plentiful. I think that means that there is so much good that we can do in the world. We can make so many changes for the better. We can bring the Kingdom of heaven near to us. I don't think Jesus is promising that the work of God will be easy – but He is promising that it will be fruitful.

“Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” Jesus says. This instruction took me a little while to understand. Do not go to Samaria, or to the Gentiles, but go only to the house of Israel. The first time I read it, this sounded like favoritism. It sounded like Jesus saying that He only came to save some, not all. But as I thought about it, I thought about the idea we can have that those we need to help are “out there” somewhere. That it isn't us, but THEM.

I think Jesus is saying – we are all in this together. We are all the lost sheep of Israel. We are like sheep without a shepherd, for whom God has compassion. No one of us is any higher than another:

- whether we have plenty in our bank accounts, or not
- whether we have a big family, or not
- whether we have a spouse, or not
- whether we have a job, or not

--we are not in categories of haves and have nots.

We are children of God, all together, and when we bring our individual gifts together, we bring the Kingdom of heaven near. As a faith community, we are able to do great good.

So: may you feel encouraged today, to do the transforming work of the gospel. May God hold you close as you labor, and may we be do-ers of the Word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

Amen.