

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
14 June 2020 – Pentecost 2

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and giving God, you have poured out upon us the fullness of your mercy and love. You have bestowed upon us every good thing of earth, sea, and sky. Your Spirit has anointed us and your Son has blessed us. You chose us from the beginning of the world and you have continued in faithfulness to us even when we have not been faithful to you. We praise you and thank you, O God, and together as your people we call upon your name this day and ask you to bless us that we might be a blessing unto you. As we have received, so help us to give - we ask it through the most holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SONG [Amazing Love](#) CCLI 192553

PSALM 8 116:1-4,12-19

Out of love the LORD has heard my cry;

***the LORD listened when I called,
therefore I will proclaim as long as I live.***

What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,

I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all God's people.

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of God's faithful ones.

O LORD, I am your servant;

I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.

You have loosed my bonds.

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all God's people,

in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

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PRAYER OF ADORATION

We would sing glad songs
to you, Commissioning God,
as we enter your heart
with thanksgiving on our lips,
for you are
that love which never ends;
that joy which overflows;
that faith which is always full.

We would proclaim our praise
to you, Voice of compassion,
as you would send us
into the world in which we live,
for you are
the Word we can speak to power;
the healing we can offer to the broken;
the justice which can replace oppression.

We would offer our hands and hearts
to you, Imaginative Spirit,
as you teach us new steps
in this dance we call life,
for you are
the cleanser of our messy hearts,
the breath of hope for shallow lungs,
the password for access to grace.

With our hearts, voices, bodies, souls,
we offer joyful noise to you,
God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy One, we confess that we are not always at our best. We are tired and burned out. We wear down. We overextend ourselves. We sometimes are short-tempered, snapping at others easily. We allow anger to bubble up and explode rather than calmly responding. We confess that at times we are downright rude to others because we haven't taken out time to rest and reconnect with you.

Forgive us of our temper tantrums. Forgive us of our short-sightedness. Forgive us for conflating busyness with holiness. Call us back into your rhythm of life, which calls for a day of rest, a Sabbath practice that honours you. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

God's love for us is proved in this:
while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,
freeing us from death's grip,
and giving us access to grace
and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [Name Above All Names](#) CCLI 3274598

BIBLE READINGS

[Genesis 18:1-15](#)

[Romans 5:1-8](#)

[Matthew 9:35-10:8](#)

SERMON [Helping the helpless](#) [sermon.mp3](#)

SONG [Worthy is the Lamb](#) CCLI 3217555

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Almighty God, you have named us your own, not through any effort of ours but because you choose to love us. May we respond with loyalty, obedience, faith and trust. (Exodus 19:2-8a)

Ever-present Counsellor, your steadfast love endures forever and your faithfulness to all generations. Inspire us by your example to reach out to all your children, embracing them with the same love we ourselves have experienced from you. Break down walls of prejudice, suspicion and hatred, and help us connect to one another in your name. (Ps 100)

God of peace, only you can give us the hope we need to continue living in a world full of challenges. Remind us of the little things you provide each day so that we may more fully treasure the enormous gift you have prepared for us, eternal life with you. Pour into us your own Spirit, for which we long. (Romans 5:1-8)

Compassionate Lord God, many among us feel harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. We pray that you will use your authority to restore these children of God:

Today, we pray especially for...

Bring your reign into their lives so your presence can be felt and wholeness may be restored. (Matthew 9-10)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG [Pentecost Prayer](#) CCLI 1271985

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

The Lord seeks willing labourers for the harvest.
Therefore go out into the world,
proclaim the good news of the nearness of God;
and call all who will hear to wholeness,
to life,
to holiness.

And may God pour love into your hearts;
May Christ Jesus open the way of grace to you;
And may the Holy Spirit work through all things
to build you up in endurance, character and hope. Amen.

HELPING THE HELPLESS

Pentecost 2 Year A

Gen 18:1-15 (221:1-7); Ps. 116:1-2, 12-19; Rom. 5:1-8; Mt. 9:35-10:8 (9-23) 14/06/2020

I believe that one of the biggest problems facing people today—one of the biggest causes of depression—one of the greatest concerns that we all have to face at one time or another—is the feeling of utter helplessness.

When we are constantly bombarded by all kinds of negative things happening in our world today (such as: COVID-19, political and social concerns, road death, crime and so on)—when the world seems like it has gone mad and even many of those around you in the community in which you live can't help but live destructive lives—it's so easy to become overwhelmed by our own feelings of inadequacy to be able to do anything that might make a difference or even give us any sense of achievement in those things that we view as important in life. And that is only exacerbated by the fact that it seems like the world is also increasingly incapable of doing anything about it. It's like we're on an ever-faster spiral downward and we can't get off the roller-coaster ride.

How do we deal with that? With such overwhelming odds, how do we deal with the knowledge that there is seemingly little that we can do to make things better—to make things, at least, survivable?

The Gospel reading for today opens with Jesus looking over the crowds of people. And while he was looking, we are told he was filled with compassion for them—overwhelmed by their helplessness and lack of direction in life. They were, as Matthew records, *“harassed and helpless”* like sheep without a shepherd. I guess, for me, it seems that things have not changed all that much over the ensuing 2000 years or so. So many today are still harassed by various forces that seek their attention—and they are helpless, drifting along without any real direction in their lives—not knowing where they are going—perhaps not even caring.

I can just imagine Jesus looking out upon these harassed and helpless people and saying to his disciples: [Look] “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” Boy is the harvest plentiful. Just look at them all. Just look at them in the shopping malls. Just look at them in our schools. Just look at them in the streets. Just look at them in your neighbourhood. Certainly the harvest is plentiful—but what can we do about it? How can we make a difference in the lives of these people?

Indeed, the harvest is plentiful, right on our own doorstep. Undoubtedly, too, the labourers, are also few. That doesn't just mean that we don't have enough ministers. The call to be a harvester is being made to every single follower of Christ. Each one of us are called to answer our own prayer and become harvesters for the kingdom of heaven. Now, the way each one of us does that harvesting will be different. It will depend on the individual circumstances of our lives—our family situation, our work situation, education, personality and temperament, and so on. Each of us will harvest differently—but each way is equally valid.

In today's Gospel Jesus begins by calling his first harvesters. He picked out twelve of his disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits—to liberate people from them and to heal every disease and sickness. Notice that the mandate is not just a “religious” one. It's not just to tell them about God, but to demonstrate the truth of the gospel and its

relevance for people's lives. It's for both spiritual and physical healing—the making whole of the complete person at every level.

Just look at the lot he sent out. They were certainly a mixed bunch of people. Some of them were probably illiterate, which was not such a serious handicap in those days when there were hardly any books. One of them was a former tax collector—one of a class of people who were despised for their dishonesty and corruption. Another one was a Zealot, a kind of anti-government rebel or subversive. There were a bunch of simple fishermen. And, as we know, one of his disciples became a traitor.

All down throughout history, Jesus has chosen unlikely people to do seemingly impossible tasks—Abraham, Moses, Debra, Barak, Peter, Paul and Mary (see what I did there?)—and many others that we find scattered throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

So when you have a look at that bunch of people, I reckon that you would lose any reason to say, “I'm not good enough” or “I don't have enough education”. When we look at the Church today, in all its vastness and complexity and in the extraordinary cultural richness it has given to the world, we could be forgiven for being amazed that this was all begun by people of such seemingly limited competence. So if Jesus could use them, he can certainly use you.

At first, these apostles are told only to go to the “lost sheep” of Israel and to avoid the Samaritans and Gentiles. God's message is first for his own people and, in general, Jesus' own work is almost entirely confined to the Jewish community. Later, of course, the mandate is extended to people everywhere. And what are these missionary apostles to do? They are to proclaim that “The kingdom of heaven is near!”

There is a real sense that even for us, mission begins at home. It begins with your family, your friends—those with whom you meet on a regular basis—and those to whom we should be reaching out in our community. It's not an attempt to change the entire world in one fell swoop but to attempt, through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, to change one little corner of it—to share our knowledge and experience of the Gospel with one person at a time.

And what is this “kingdom of heaven”? Well, it certainly isn't a place as we would understand the term “kingdom”. It might be better to speak of the reign of God or the kingship of God. The kingship of God is close because of the presence of Jesus Christ. We enter the kingdom not by going somewhere but, in faith, by aligning ourselves totally with the Way of Jesus, when his thoughts become our thoughts, when his ways become our ways.

The apostles are to show the nearness of the Kingdom by curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, casting out demons. These are all signs of God's loving power reaching deep into people's lives.

In modern terms that could mean:

Bringing healing into people's lives. People can be sick in many ways, and not just physically. We can all be agents for bringing healing and wholeness back into people's lives, especially those with whom we come in contact.

We may have some difficulty raising people from the dead. We can, however, help people to recover an interest and zest for living. People can be physically alive but dead in many other respects.

Cleanse lepers. For us, that is to rehabilitate and bring back fully into our communities all those who, for one reason or another, are marginalised, rejected, despised or ostracised for any reason. It's being a friend to those who have no friends.

Cast out demons. They might be real demons, but very often in our day demons are also all those forces that suffocate and enslave us—those things which dominate, manipulate and restrict our freedom to live in truth and love. They include many elements of our contemporary lifestyle—the pressures to conform to what is in fashion, whether it be clothes, food, drugs of all kinds—prescribed and non-prescribed—the tendencies to self-indulgence, extreme individualism and violence of all kinds. We have to start by casting out these demons from our own hearts before we can help others to true liberation.

How can you tell the kingdom of heaven is at hand? I'll tell you how. You'll experience the presence of Christ in your heart. As an outflow of our worship and devotion to God, things start to happen. Miracles begin to happen. People's lives are changed.

Finally, says Jesus, "You received without payment; give without payment." All that we have is God's gift to us. God's gifts to us are literally price-less. They are meant to be used freely and liberally for the benefit of all. We are not in the business of sharing our faith for the money or the kudos it brings. Believe me, it doesn't bring much of either. Furthermore, we are not a closed society where only the 'elect' are welcome. We must welcome all.

And there is one more thing that must be in place in our lives, if we are to be successful harvesters for God's kingdom. And that is, we must share Christ's compassion for people. We must have such a heart-felt and Spirit-guided passion for the wholeness of the people who are around us, that sharing the gospel and proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom of heaven becomes second nature.

Leslie Newbigin, in his book, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, said. "Live your life in such a way that other people look at you and say, 'I want what you've got.'" Saint Francis of Assisi, living in the late 1100s and early 1200s, instructing his disciples said, "Go forth and preach the gospel. If necessary, use words."

So, look around you, "the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." Be the answer to your own prayer. Become a spiritual harvester yourself for God's kingdom—guided by the compassion of Christ and empowered by the Spirit of Christ.

To whom be all the glory, honour and praise. Amen.