

Last week I preached about the ways in which healing allows us to answer God's call and how in answering God's call we often find ourselves healed. Today's gospel follows last weeks and is therefore related.

Jesus is still at the beginning of his ministry, traveling between cities and villages, proclaiming the kingdom of God, teaching and curing with love and compassion for the lost, the least, who are like sheep without a shepherd. It is not work for one, for the harvest is plenty by the laborers are few. So, he summons the twelve disciples he has recently called. Matthew names the twelve as apostles, meaning "sent ones" and Jesus commissions them to go out and following his example, cure the sick, and proclaim the Good News of God's kingdom, the hallmark of which is God's inclusive love, justice, and peace.

If we are listening closely, we may be brought up short by the notion that the apostles are to go solely to the lost sheep of Israel. This aligns with our Old Testament reading from Exodus in which God refers to Israel as God's "treasured possession out of all the peoples" a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation." This is not just a point of privilege but part of a covenantal relationship between God and these people who are to then spread the word of God to all the people of God. It is very much like the commissioning of the apostles by Jesus and not long after Jesus sent the apostles to the lost sheep of Israel the mission expanded to include Gentile nations as well.

The Israelites, the apostles, are called and then sent with a specific purpose to, as our collect reminds us, proclaim God's truth with boldness, and minister God's justice with compassion. To reconcile the least and the lost to God. Jesus teaches them, and us, to BE disciples then the work shifts to the MAKING of disciples through our encounters with others.

Which brings us to one of our most favorite words in the church, especially among us New Englanders, evangelism.

It isn't enough to follow Jesus. We need to proclaim Jesus in word and action. To share our stories of faith and to be the hands and feet of Christ among those most in need of his healing grace. Jesus shows us how by doing it himself. Our baptismal covenant spells out how.

We proclaim the good news that we are loved unconditionally by God who created us in God's image and calls all good. We are forgiven by our merciful God with no strings attached. We are called into a deeply profound relationship with God as often and no matter how far we stray. We have a place in the kingdom of God where we will be drawn ever deeper into the heart of God for all eternity.

We make disciples by being disciples. We are kind and generous to all, healing the brokenness caused by the world, when we refuse to hate, but instead love as unconditionally as we are loved. We make peace where there is division. We are one and the same in God's eyes, so why would we ever dwell on anything that seems to make us different. God's love, writes St. Paul, "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit," and as disciples we share that love freely and unconditionally.

There is often a mistaken notion that this is only the work of the ordained – and that the people in the pews are off the hook. But this is just not so. In baptism we are all ordained ministers in the church. Just open your prayer books to the catechism (it's in the back where few of us go) on page 855. "Who are the ministers of the Church? The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons." Notice who comes first. "What is the ministry of the laity? The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church."

So, I ask again – what is God calling you to do, commissioning, in large and small ways, to lift up the kingdom of God before others? And how will you answer?