

Proper 6  
Year A 2020  
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Jesus opens with a statement  
as to the immense need he has witnessed  
in the crowds he has encountered.

Jesus moves to respond to this overwhelming need  
with the realization that he alone can't,  
and won't be able to, respond on his own.

Jesus commissions twelve of the disciples  
to go out into the world  
to work to address the needs of those most in need.

He instructs them to proclaim the good news  
that the kingdom of heaven has come near.

And specifically, this proclamation is realized  
when the sick are cured,  
the dead are raised to new life,  
the lepers are cleansed and  
demons are cast away.

My somewhat educated guess is that  
the twelve disciples took a big gulp after this instruction.

Maybe they even thought,  
He's got to be kidding!

I mean really,  
they've travelled with Jesus for miles and miles,  
in cities, through the countryside,  
in synagogues, and marketplaces.

They've seen him confront the most hostile groups,  
cure every ailment that's been presented,  
drive out demons,  
touch and cleanse lepers.

They must seriously be considering a small revolt at this point.

I imagine a moment when they all  
look at each other to see  
if they're alone in their disbelief,  
their fear and uncertainty at what is being asked of them.

But Jesus, even armed with the knowledge of the political realities,  
the opposition of the Temple elite,  
and the social divisions,  
does not back down.

He trusts that the disciples will be successful in their mission.

You see, Jesus doesn't require perfection.

I mean, after all, if you look at Jesus' ministry,  
he wasn't batting a thousand was he?

Not everyone he came into contact with  
in every crowd followed Him did they?

Clearly not, given the crowd  
from the synagogue actually tried to kill him  
after his pronouncement of the Good News  
from Isaiah.

The Temple elite clearly were not persuaded.

The Romans, as a whole,  
were not moved to end their occupation as I recall.

He wasn't welcomed into the halls  
of the politically powerful  
and given a seat at the council table.

But Jesus trusts us,  
His disciples, however imperfect we may be,  
to go into the broken and hurting world around us,  
to proclaim the good news of the kingdom.

My brothers and sisters,  
if there was ever a time that this proclamation was needed,  
it is now.

No doubt about it.

You see, the wonderful, frightening truth  
of this gospel passage  
is that we are being asked,  
no invited, to make a leap of faith.

In the words of commentator Alexander Wimberly:

*This text forces us  
to acknowledge the gap  
between the ideal and the real,  
and then to take a major leap of faith in our own discipleship.*

Admittedly, acknowledging this commission is clearly overwhelming.

We have not been in the presence of Jesus  
like the disciples as he healed, cleansed, cured and cast out.

They at least had the opportunity to see  
the actual acts and results of Jesus' ministry.

But we're thousands of years on and  
that's just not how it goes in our world right?

Or is it?

What about the thousands who have,  
over the course of time, fed the hungry,  
offered clothing, or provided shelter to those without?

What about those who have invented medicines and protocols  
that have cured hundreds of thousands  
of diseases which were thought to be incurable?

What about those who have taken the time to listen  
and worked to bring about change to systems that oppressed?

A lot of positive change has taken place  
since the time of Jesus and present day.

And a lot of positive change needs to take place in our time and place.

No doubt if I look in the mirror  
I can too readily recognize the gap  
between the real and the ideal.

Today we stand at the border of the promise of a better world  
here and now,  
in our time and our place.

Will we move forward or fall back?

There have been other times  
When reform and renewal were being demanded.

But it feels to me as though this time is different.

Just as I'm sure it felt different to many others  
over the course of history as

- slavery was abolished,
- people of color and women obtained the right to vote,
- the fall of the Berlin wall,
- the end of apartheid,
- the expansion of education to girls and people of color,
- fair housing and equal opportunity employment acts were passed,
- advancements in the rights of LGBTQ persons, including marriage
- passage of the Affordable Care Act,
- the appointment of women and people of color to the Supreme Court  
and elected to public office.

Just as it was for each of those momentous times,  
many who took discipleship to heart,  
took advantage of the time and opportunity  
to not just proclaim  
but to actively usher in a fuller realization  
of the kingdom which Jesus proclaims.

As we gather today as a community  
of Jesus' disciples,  
there is no shame in admitting that  
the reforms and renewals that are so long overdue  
will be difficult to achieve.

It will not be easy nor quick.

Groundbreaking change never has been.

These changes will require our steadfast attention and action.

It will require us to dig deep into our own lives  
and make substantial changes.

We are keenly aware of the gap between the real and the ideal.

The vast difference between the world as it is today  
and the kingdom of heaven.

But we are equipped with everything we need.

We know through the life and work  
of Jesus and the disciples through the ages  
what we need to be successful.

The question is –  
are we willing to be the bridge  
between the real and the ideal in our time and our place?

Jesus trusts us to go out and proclaim the kingdom.

Are we willing to step out in faith?