

These three verses wrap up Matthew chapter 10. In this chapter Jesus names his principle disciples and sends them out to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, and cast out demons. They are to proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." They are to go to homes, and if they are welcomed, they are to gently be in conversation concerning the goodness of God. If they are not welcomed, they are to quietly withdraw, and seek out another home in hopes the next household will be open to listen.

In the home where you are welcomed, the saying of Jesus is true, "The one who welcomes you, dear disciple, welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes God who sent me."

Have you ever gone out door to door to homes that were not expecting you? Have you ever gone out door to door to people who did not know you? I have during my first year of seminary. Our seminary class was sent out to congregations in the Twin Cities area. Three of us were assigned to a congregation in south Minneapolis to observe and participate in the ministry of the congregation. One area of ministry I participated in was an outreach plan to go out into the neighborhood surrounding the church building. We knocked on doors and introduced ourselves as people collecting non-perishable food items for a local food pantry and our thank you contained information on the congregation, where it was located, and when it gathered for worship.

It was not very effective in starting conversations. It was not very effective in getting people fired up enough to join the congregation in worship. Most of the time people were okay with giving us some canned goods but they didn't have patience or interest in anything else. Overall, they were not welcoming of our presence, and really, why should they have been welcoming. Besides that, our message was weak, perhaps even muddled, "Come join us in worship. We are good people. See? We help the hungry." The outreach plan was not designed to just bring good news to a world in need, but was more of a method to increase the numbers of the congregation. It did not succeed.

Jesus mission was focused. The disciples were to notice the sick and heal them. The disciples were to notice those separated from useful life because of a feared

and debilitating disease, then lay hands on them and make right their lives. The disciples were to identify people who were hounded by evil and persistent demons and exorcise the evil spirits. The disciples were to proclaim good news of a radical reversal. The kingdom of death is coming to a close and the kingdom of life is beginning.

The disciples were to trust God, to open themselves to the welcome of others, to avoid controlling the interaction and instead find a way to be with the ones they met, and to live a way of life that is beyond personal gain. In this way, Jesus was teaching the disciples to become siblings and family to the very ones they were sent out to. At the same time the disciples were to become as ones also in need of a cup of cold water, a square meal, and a roof over their heads.

This is a strange word to wrap my head around. How can disciples be sent with a purpose to bring what is needed to another but also be ones who stands in need of what the other possesses?

Jesus words are unsettling for us. I struggle with these words today. I would rather be the one who welcomes and leave it at that. I don't wish to be dependent upon someone else. I want to give what I feel comfortable giving and call it a day. I know who I am when I give what I can. Who am I when I stand in need of receiving from another?

Another pastor who recently wrote on this text helps to clarify what unsettles me. Diane Roth of Grace Lutheran in Conroe, Texas writes: "Jesus' words make me distinctly uncomfortable. They make me realize that I have a privilege his early disciples did not have. I have power. I have the power to welcome others—or to turn my back...Maybe Jesus never meant for us to be that powerful...Maybe from these places (of being ones needing assistance) we can give a more powerful witness to the power of God's love—from places of vulnerability."

When Jesus sent out the disciples he taught them to pay attention, to tend to those who were sick, possessed, and lost. He gave the disciples the authority to heal, free, and make whole. He sent his disciples out to tend to the identity of harassed and helpless, to change their circumstance, and give them a new identity, one that would join the disciples to lives of those they were sent out to.

Jesus was creating more than healed and freed individuals, his vision was to create a new community where people depended on one another. Jesus teaching is that we need each other, and that not one of us is to be greater than the next one. He sent his disciples out but he also made them rely on the ones they were sent to.

We often miss this when we read these verses.

The pandemic has heightened our senses. We are more aware today of those who are so close to the edge of poverty or personal disaster. One story that struck me early on in April was the account of an EMT on the East Coast. Every day he was in harm's way transporting people who likely had the coronavirus and yet he did not have the correct PPE. Then he told how his EMT job was one of three he held to make ends meet. On top of that, he himself was not able to afford health insurance. So here was one man who loved to help people in need, who was himself extremely vulnerable to the conditions of life. We as a society rely on him, but likewise he cannot rely on us. How might we tend to him so that we can live together as one?

I think that is where Jesus is leading us that we are to live together as one. We are to live as ones who need one another.

We are learning fast in these months. Actually we do want you to be welcoming as you follow us online. We are asking that you comment when you join us, that you react as we worship and sing, and that you post prayers when we lift our petitions as the body of Christ. If something doesn't go quite right, kindly

let us know or ask a question, even by email. Be aware that others are logging on and listening and observing. Wonder about how your comment can show a welcoming online atmosphere. Think about how you can interact and support each other. Think about how what we say reflects whose we are.

We are people gathered around the mercy of Christ, who find welcome and hospitality with Jesus, who worship God.

I am glad we are thinking of these things from a different vantage point. This is a time to see Jesus' word anew! This is a time of revelation, then, of God's ways. Notice that Jesus teaches his disciples to respect a person's identity as they welcome that one. The phrase "in the name of" is to be understood to mean, "because of who they are." Whoever welcomes a prophet because of who they are, and out of respect for the office of the prophet and because of the work of the prophet, will receive a prophet's reward. And the prophet's reward is to be connected to Jesus! Taking into account the person's identity is very important to Jesus. He repeats this instruction three times!

This was the first time I had really been in a neighborhood which was diverse in people and culture. I had the head knowledge that it was an area that was changing in population but I didn't have the understanding to see or know what that meant. The congregation's roots were from a Swedish settlement but now there was a mix of races. Today there is an uneasy atmosphere signaled by the present work within that congregation to address racial in justice. I was so proud when I read in our church's magazine, *The Living Lutheran*, that a group of people had formed a racial justice group to tackle issues. It gave me courage to consider how I might address racial justice here in Eau Claire.

Then two things happened. First, an opportunity to support a Latino ministry in Eau Claire suddenly emerged. ELCA grant money was freed up and our synod pursued it immediately.

Second, another Black person was killed, this time one block from the congregation I had gotten to know in seminary,