

Second Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

In preparation for today's reflection can you call to mind an occasion when you were asked to step in to mediate a conflict, maybe between family members, or friends, or at a community level. How did you prepare? How did you priorities effort and time?

Text

Matt 9:35–10:8 (9–23)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Comment

Jesus' ministry was one of availability. He 'went about' through towns and villages sharing knowledge ('teaching'); enthusing hearts ('proclaiming good news') and curing with compassion ('healing bodies').

Faith-based reconcilers offer a similar ‘ministry of availability’ – ‘going about’ quietly mediating conflict, hosting difficult dialogue and teaching reconciliation. Their under-the-radar proclamations of conflict as mission, of the necessity for lament before resurrection, of reconciliation beginning first in the heart before then reaching out to the community are quiet examples of reconcilers ‘letting their lives speak.’

This three-fold approach of teaching, preaching and healing touches the head, the heart and the body. As healers, or reconcilers, we are called to appeal to all the senses, to reach out to the intellectuals, to the heart-lifters, to the body-workers, all of whom have equal value and worth and may be equally ‘lost’, regardless of their tribal belonging, their status or their pedigree.

This is what you must do he says now to us, as he did to the named disciples. Multiply this programme: teach, enthuse, heal. Jesus named his disciples and gave them authority, gritty authority, dressed as courage, hope, and practical skills. The group he called was as eclectic as those they were called to serve – including even the one who was to betray him. So we must follow, with authority, and with our varied skills in ministry, bringing every ounce of our skill and authority (courage and hope) to those who need it most: the lost. And we must travel light. As St. Francis wisely counselled his friars: “Go, preach the Gospel, using words only where necessary.”

This text contains a controversial and disputed verse: “Don’t go amongst Gentiles or to any city of Samaria.”

Why? Commentaries on this text are varied. Was Jesus establishing sensible priorities? Was it political expediency? Was he referencing a prophecy from Isaiah? Or was he advising to avoid those who had not yet repented?

Jesus’ emphasis was less on who to avoid, more on those to whom we must reach out: ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ The priority in our work for reconciliation, in our ministry of availability, is to remain firmly focussed on those who are ‘lost’, who are looking for a compass-bearing to navigate stormy waters.

And who are the lost? To what extent is each one of us lost, seeking a route, a rootedness in our hearts, a steadying rudder, a reminder of that which is essential, to which we must cleave, around which we may coalesce to find solace, meaning, clarity of purpose in order then to take action for justice and peace in the world.

Response

Jesus’ focus on the lost, and our converse preoccupation with tribal belonging is a wise message in our world of ever-more-firm borders. Our prophet and our God calls us to remain focussed on the deepest needs in each one of us as beloved human beings over our local, regional, national or global belonging.

How does ‘your life speak’ of reconciliation? To what extent are you able to offer a ‘ministry of availability’? What stops you from offering this ministry? What does Jesus’ ‘authority’ mean to you?

Prayer

Lord,
may our lives speak.

May our lives speak
through enthusiastic preaching
which does not crave attention;
through quiet proclaiming of your Gospel hope;
through considered questions
offered in training and coaching and
a robust cajoling of the world and its leaders
to inhabit a culture of lasting peace with justice
that knows no borders
but is rooted in a sense
of home, in you.

Amen.