

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**June 18, 2017**  
**Father's Day**  
**Matthew 9:35-10:8**

Happy Father's Day! Even if Hallmark makes a fortune off this relatively new holiday, I like to take advantage of any opportunity to be reminded of the man through whom I was given the gift of life. My father died 16 years ago yet I still feel his presence when I most need it and sometimes, when I least expect it.

It's interesting when someone dies that while we miss them terribly, so much of who they were lives on. I don't know about you but for me, with my parents especially, it's almost as though the things that irritated me have fallen away and I'm left with the deep truth that they loved me the best way they knew how. And that knowledge just deepens my love and appreciation for them.

For me this is a wonderful way of grasping God's attitude towards us. The Holy One sees beyond our faults and misbehaviours to the core person beneath. The person created in love, meant for love, sustained in love – and learning and growing and doing the best they know how to love.

Jesus coined the term "Father" to help describe a God beyond description. "Father" hopefully helps people imagine a loving parent. One who cares and encourages, teaches and guides. One who has their child's back. For those among us who did not experience love

and care at the hand of their father, this parental image can be a triggering. For them, it might be more helpful to imagine their mother, or someone else's father whom they admire.

Someone who guides and encourages, instructs and watches over. Someone who nurtures for the innermost person in their care. In our reading from Matthew this morning, we see Jesus walking through the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues. People are following him, hungry for his word; for his compassion, for his healing. And in the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse Matthew tells us, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Wait a minute! We just heard that Jesus was going around teaching in the synagogues of the places he visited. There would have been teachers and priests in each town and village. Wasn't their job to care for the people? What was Jesus saying?

The word "harassed" translates from the Greek as "faint" or "weak." Knowing this we can imagine that the people following Jesus were hungry and tired from walking long hours in the hot sun. But, he is also referring to another kind of weakness and hunger. The hunger of the soul to be guided. Jesus knows these people following him are hungry for the word of God. They need instruction and guidance and they are not getting it.

Why? Jesus sees that the scribes and priests are more concerned with ritual observances than with the moral and spiritual direction of those entrusted to their care. They are more concerned

with appearing self-righteous and pious. They are not leading the people. And the people are hungry for leadership and guidance. Jesus says to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.” In other words, there are so many sheep hungry for the word of God yet there are so few shepherds/so few loving leaders to guide and care for them.

Three times in this reading, we hear about the kind of leadership Jesus is engaged in, and what he is commissioning his disciples to likewise do. In the 1<sup>st</sup> verse - he went about “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.” Halfway through the reading: “Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and sickness.” And then we end with his instruction: “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

It’s clear that Jesus wasn’t saying, “Make sure the candles are only lit in this order, never spill the wine, only sing these songs, and make sure you bow before the altar.” Jesus isn’t concerned with form. Jesus is concerned with love. And in this reading he tells us that we will know “the kingdom of heaven has come near” when we are enabling what people are yearning for – healing and freedom.

So what is the lesson for us today? It’s startling in some ways. Because this reading ends with words, that if we took in, would shake us up and reorient all we are doing. This call to heal, forgive, support and free others isn’t something we do because we are good people.

We do it because, as Jesus says, “You receive without payment; give without payment.”

In our culture, we like to think we have earned what we have now. We like to believe we are self-made. But Jesus is very clear – Our lives have been given to us by God. And the natural response is to give as generously of all that we are and have, to others – or “to share” as our kindergarten teacher told us.

We get confused. We think we’ve earned what we’ve been given. Yet Jesus is very clear about this in other parts of scripture. God makes the sun to shine on everyone. God gives in abundance and we are called to share abundantly. God yearns for everyone to be free and healed so those with the resources to support, guide and nurture are enabled to do so. And in this way, bring about the kingdom of heaven.

It’s engaging with this outpouring of love and abundance that is our birthright. What a wonderful opportunity, what a dynamic way to live, what a gift we’ve been given!

Yet so often we see people confusing their identify with their gifts. We hear people say, “I am an accountant, “ or “I am wealthy,” or “I am a musician,” instead of saying “I’ve been given these amazing gifts to share.” We stop the flow of abundance by limiting ourselves to a label. We use labels to make ourselves look good to others, or to diminish ourselves. How often I’ve heard, “I’m only a housewife, or “I don’t work outside the home.” We’re crazy! Why can’t we say, “I have this wonderful opportunity to support and guide others; to enrich

their lives, to make it possible for others to flourish.” In other words, what if we focused on what we’re able to do instead of who we are?

A lot more people would not be starving; figuratively or literally. We wouldn’t talk about retirement, we’d talk about changing the way we offer our gifts. Elders would mentor the young ones. The method of sharing our gifts would naturally change over a lifetime.

“We received without payment,” Jesus points out, “so give without payment.” Then we will know that the kingdom of heaven has come near. We have the resources and ability to do what Jesus commissions us to do. We can cure the sick – we can care for our friends, elders and neighbours by bringing chicken soup and our loving presence; we can raise the dead by helping people get free of the things that are killing them – poverty, addiction, despair; we can cleanse the lepers – we can reach out to those who are marginalized in our society, the “sinners” Jesus ate with.

We can do all these things. Freely. Joyfully. We don’t have to judge others worthy or unworthy. That’s not our job. Our call is to give freely where we can.

Yesterday at our Regional Meeting, we celebrated the Eucharist and the Bishop’s homily focused on the reading from a letter of Paul’s to the Corinthians. Logan talked about the early church, explaining that the church in Corinth would have been a house church – a few faithful families gathering together. He made the analogy that we, in the church today are somewhat like that – small and without many resources. I liked part of the analogy but the idea that we are without

many resources rankled. We are living in one of the wealthiest areas of the world. We have so much in terms of money, talent and time. If we wanted to, we could do anything. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we could go into the harvest of our lives, which is plentiful, and do so many wonderful and creative things. We just have to believe. And when we do, we will see that the kingdom of heaven is so near, and we never knew it.

We are not our titles, we are not our jobs. We are the ones whom God has blessed with life. And the fruits and gifts of our lives are meant to be shared.

As we sit in silence after this sermon, and listen to the gift which is Margaret's to share, let us rest into the knowledge that we are loved beyond measure by the Holy One we call Father. And with God's guidance and nurturing, may we as individuals and as the community of St. Mary's find our way to sharing this life we've been given. That way we will live into a very happy day for the Father, indeed.

Amen.