



**St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene**  
**The Reverend Glenda Empsall, Deacon**

[Genesis 18:1-15, \(21:1-7\), Psalm 116:1, 10-17, Romans 5:1-8, Matthew 9:35-10:8\(9-23\)](#)

God of love and compassion, for whom all things are possible, may the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be pleasing to you. *Amen.*

Happy Father's Day! How fortuitous that on Father's Day we read from Genesis about Abraham, who was the father of many nations.

Even though preaching classes discourage preachers from expanding more than one reading from the Sunday lectionary for the sermon, when the lessons so beautifully complement each other, why not? I promise not to preach a 10 minute sermon on every reading. I'm just going to focus on a few of the juicy bits!

Abraham and Sarah were both "too old" to have children. The Lord appeared to Abraham in the form of three strangers and Abraham knew right away that they were not ordinary visitors, but messengers from God. Let's just call them "Angels." Abraham sprang into over-the-top hospitality mode – rest under the trees' cool shade; water to wash feet; bread, meat, and dairy delicacies to eat. The Angels revealed that Sarah would give birth to a son. Sarah was intrigued, even hopeful, but thought that was not possible. Pregnancy at her age? What a joke! She laughed. An angel heard her laugh and asked, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" Of course not!

The Psalm response to the Genesis reading is not related to Sarah's and Abraham's desire for a child, but it speaks to any and all prayers asked and answered. The reading from Romans. "...we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Every time you feel as though no one hears your prayers, that life is too hard to bear, read and meditate on Romans 5:1-8 again – and again – and again! Hope does NOT disappoint us...

The Gospel, the Good News according to Matthew. Matthew borrowed material from Mark and edited it to fit his own interpretation of Jesus ministry. I'm sure you've noticed that, in general, Matthew is more outspoken than Mark or Luke that Jesus IS the Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew is also more forgiving of the Disciples' cluelessness and much more harsh toward the Jewish authorities; the scribes and Pharisees.

The official title of today's Gospel passage is "The Mission of the Twelve." "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Compassion is not mere pity. It is empathy and solidarity with the sufferings of another. "Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'" In Matthew's gospel the disciples were passionate evangelists in whom Jesus placed his trust and, "...authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and sickness." Jesus warned them about

predators on the road, “Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me” to be made an example. The disciples always are to tell the truth anyway.

Jesus – the teacher, prophet and healer -- attracted crowds like a megastar would today. The more people Jesus cured, the more people came to him. Jesus may not have been overwhelmed, but he knew he did not have long to live. He wanted to empower his followers to do this important work. As followers of Jesus, we are also called to do what we can. I acknowledge that 21<sup>st</sup> century ailments expand on the 1<sup>st</sup> century ones. Jesus gave the 12 his own power and told them to do four things<sup>1</sup>:

1. **Cure the sick.** Let us not ignore the poisons that intoxicate us – addictions, anger, apathy, contempt, fear, greed, indifference. Name your own poison. **Proclaim the power of God to heal.**
2. **Raise the dead.** Do not leave us in our tombs or sitting comfortably in our “pews” – wearing our blinders to injustices in the world, in our nation, in our community, in the church. How are you entombed? **Proclaim the power of God to raise us up.**
3. **Cleanse the lepers.** Do not abandon the outcast in their misery – the refugees, the poor, the homeless, the sick, those with mental illness, the forgotten, the abandoned. What hurts can you heal? **Proclaim the power of God to restore us to beloved community.**
4. **Cast out demons.** Do not accept demonic powers of evil. Name them -- all ‘isms’ – anti-Semitism, fascism, materialism, racism, sexism; all phobias – homophobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia. What demons are heavy in your heart and soul? **Proclaim the power of God to cast them out.**

The core of our Christian faith is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is always as near as God’s love and God’s love is for everyone. “Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

God’s love is available to all. God’s love does not discriminate. This was not (is not) a popular message for some holding on to position and power; those who want to exclude “the other.” The councils, governors and kings didn’t like Jesus’ message of equity and love. Neither did those in power appreciate Jesus’ followers proclaiming as Jesus had instructed them. There are those who want to kill the messengers, but the message must be delivered. Jesus and his followers told the truth anyway.

We are Jesus’ followers. You and I, right here and right now are Jesus’ messengers. Do you feel equipped for the tasks of ministry and the tasks of discipleship? Do you think if we named the demons, we could cast them out? Let us find our courage to fearlessly proclaim the good news. “If you cannot preach like Peter, and you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus who died to save us all.”

God of love, who Jesus called Abba, Father, help us to see those in need. Make us your gracious servants, that the whole world may know and share your love. *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Carter Florence, Professor of Preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, and a presenter at the 2020 Festival of Homiletics, Atlanta, GA 5/2020