

Matthew 10:1-5

Have you ever thought about the scriptures where Jesus tells his disciples to cast out demons and to heal the sick? He tells us that the Holy Spirit will come and that we can do all the things that he had done during his earthly ministry. Yet what does that even mean for us today? Can we really do those things that Jesus did when he walked the earth?

Like this week, the disciples are told to go, but they aren't told to go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans, but to their own people. Go to the lost sheep of Israel. And who are the lost sheep of Israel for us? I suppose we could think about the Christian nationalists who claim to know God and to be doing the work of God, but only preach hate. But perhaps it is even closer to home - our neighbors who are good people yet don't know the joy of knowing Jesus Christ or even our own relatives who are perhaps the hardest people to preach the good news to as we know each others flaws and have difficulty communicating just how much Christ's love has changed us.

When I think of this passage it reminds me of my mother. We had a family across the street from us who had three young daughters. The oldest was my sister's age. It made my mother a bit crazy that they didn't go to church and that the children weren't being raised in the faith. And so one day she went over there and told the mother she would like to bring the girls to church with us. I think the mother was so taken aback by that that she told my mother she would bring the girls herself, and she did. What began as an invitation led to this family becoming very involved in the church. The husband became a deacon, was active on committees, and the girls were very involved

in Sunday school and eventually youth group. And the mother also taught Sunday school for a time and she was always there in the pew with her family.

It's a challenge to think about who God is calling us to preach the good news to and even more of a challenge to get out of our comfort zone to actually share the Good News or to invite someone to join us on a Sunday morning.

I remember reading the recommendation one author made on a different way of doing both evangelism and small group ministry. One of his suggestions was extending beyond the church family, that is to say that people may not initially be interested in going to church on Sunday morning, but they may be very interested in spirituality and faith issues.

This expert talked about inviting friends and neighbors over to one's house for discussion and fellowship. What he found through his work was that people were good at getting groups started with friends and neighbors when approached a little differently. Come for friendship and conversation about faith and God. No doctrine. No rituals. Just coming together in openness. Thinking outside the box to meet the needs of those who need to hear the Good News.

With church attendance in mainline denominations on an endless decline, I think it is important for the church to analyze every aspect of ministry - worship, education, outreach, mission. And this is the perfect time for you to do this as you undertake this mission study and figure out the ways in which God is calling this church forward

into its future. Thinking outside the box to reach people. To share the good news.

The next part of the passage tells us to preach that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Isn't that a hard one to preach!. We have only to look at the news on our phones to see how messed up our world has become. We know that for centuries there have been predictions of the return of Christ. But perhaps there is a different way of thinking about this.

The preaching and healing that are instructed in this passage are to go hand in hand. As in the ministry of Jesus, the disciples' proclamation of the good news must be corroborated by signs of the kingdom. And those signs come primarily through healing. Isn't that what Jesus' ministry was all about? Healing. And that is exactly what we are told to do: heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the demons. By doing this, we can see and others can see how the kingdom is at hand.

I came across a reflection by Pope Leo that looked more deeply at the meaning of the Greek words for heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out the demons. Reading this made me realize how wonderful it is to have the ability to go back to the original text and really analyze the intent of what was written. However, I barely passed Greek and Hebrew, so I'm going to rely on what Pope Leo wrote. So here is your Greek lesson for the day and please forgive my pronunciation.

1. Therapeute tous asthenountas- Heal the Sick.

Pope Leo writes that “asthenountas” doesn’t mean just physically sick, but instead refers to anything weak, feeble, or broken. So the command isn’t only about hospital beds. It’s also about strengthening tired souls, restoring broken confidence, helping someone who’s emotionally drained feel whole again.

My last church prided itself on being the family that the spiritually broken came to to be made whole. It was one third lgbtq and in an area of the country where Baptist and Pentecostal churches abounded, as well as many smaller conservative churches, there were a lot of members who had been cast aside by the churches they’d grown up in or even some who were cast out by their families for being gay. What a gift to be able to give people a sense of hope and welcome when they had found none from the places and people that should have been giving it to them all along.

I think of my friend’s husband who for years was a scout leader. They had chosen not to have children, but Larry had always been active in Scouts growing up and wanted to share his love for all things outdoors with boys like himself. His wife told me that he tended to find those boys who didn’t have a male figure in their lives, fathers who had left or were negligent due to being workaholics. Larry brought those boys some healing and love and the mothers some relief of feeling that a need in their sons’ lives that they weren’t able to fill was being filled by this caring and generous man.

2. Next we have Egirete nekrous - Raise the dead. Pope Leo tells us that Nekrous wasn’t just about corpses. It also spoke of things that are not functioning. A marriage that has stopped working. A dream that

has died. A faith that has gone cold. “Raise the dead” means go awaken what has fallen into lifelessness.

Who do you know who might be in need of resurrection? And how might you be able to help them find life again?

When I think of my faith story, I think about how God provided people along the way who loved me and encouraged me. Who held my hand when I needed a hand or offered a shoulder to cry on, a room in their home when I needed some time away from my life. People who were there when I needed encouragement.

It was God caring for me through these wonderful people of faith - youth advisors, unexpected strangers who entered my life and became family, others who passed by me for only a moment in time yet changed me forever. I wouldn't be here without their faithfulness to reach out and care. Who do you know who needs resurrection love right now?

3. Katherarizete leprous - Cleanse the leper. The word “leprous” comes from “lepros,” which means something considered filthy, rejected, untouchable. Jesus was saying: go and bring back dignity to those whom society has thrown away. Wash off the shame. Don't run from them - run toward them. You know how lepers were ostracized back in Jesus' day. There are still plenty of people who are outcast today,

In the eighties and early nineties, while in seminary and for a few years after I graduated, I worked with AIDS patients - drug addicts,

gay people, a few hemophiliacs. What I saw was so much emotional pain from being rejected and cast out.

I met a pastor during this time who told me this story. He had gone to the hospital to see a parishioner. As he was walking down the hallway, he noticed a young man sitting on the edge of his bed. He knocked and introduced himself. The man was HIV positive and had been rejected by his family. The pastor spoke with him and prayed with him and asked if he could come see him again. The man said yes. The pastor also invited him to his church when he was well enough to come.

In preparation for having a gay man with HIV come to the church, remember this was the 80's, he spoke with his congregation and so on the day the young man came with some friends, the church welcomed them with open arms. As word got out that this was a safe and welcoming place, more of his friends began to come. Cleansing them from the shame that society tried to place on them.

And the same can be said of the drug addict. I worked with many drug addicts and the pain that they had experienced in their lives was palpable, yet for many, they see drug addicts as deviant, criminals, people to stay away from. Yet what they need most is acceptance and love.

Filthy, rejected, untouchable. Jesus says go and bring back dignity to those whom society has thrown away. What can this church do for those who've been rejected?

4. And finally, Ekballante daimonia - Cast out the demons.

“Daimonia” doesn’t always mean literal demons. It includes fears, lies, addictions, oppression, anything that chains a person from the inside. Jesus was saying: free people. Helps them break what’s breaking them.

I think of people I’ve met along the way who were told they weren’t good enough, not smart enough, not pretty enough, not enough. Low self-esteem keeping them from having the life that God desired for them. What could their lives be like if their demons were cast out? If they could see themselves the way God sees them? Who do you know who needs demons cast out?

The word that kept coming to me as I thought about this passage was Grace. Grace: God’s unmerited favor and love towards humanity; a gift freely given, not something earned or deserved. We have been shown such grace from God and we are called to bestow that same grace toward others. Grace, love, hope. We are called on to help others find life and to find ways to live that life in abundance.

We aren’t called to be superhero’s and the tasks God is calling us to doesn’t require superpowers. What it calls us to do is to open our eyes to who is in need, who is hurting, who is dying under the weight of life, and then to help them find healing, find resurrection.

How is this church going out and healing the sick? Raising the dead? Cleansing the lepers? Casting out demons? How are you going out to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, cast out the demon?

So, again, I say to you: Go! Go forth and preach that the kingdom of God is near. Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Cleanse the leper. Cast out the demons. God has given you everything you need to do just that. People are hurting. They need us to bring them God's light and life. So Go!! Amen.