

Worship Service “ *Leading the Pack* ”

3rd Sunday of Pentecost, Year A

18th June 2023

Romans 5:1-8 NRSV / Matthew 9:35-10:8 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video)

[*Call It Grace*](#)

Performed by Unspoken,

written by Chad Mattson, Jonathan Lowry, Michael Farren, and Seth Mosley, CCLI SONG #7012897, 2013 Centricity Music Publishing (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), CentricSongs (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), Integrity's Alleluia! Music (Admin. by Integrity Music), used and reported under Streaming CCLI license 20261246

Welcome/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn

Wonderful Grace of Jesus

150

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: On an ordinary Sunday, we come to worship God:

All: **We come, trusting God will speak to us; we come, hoping God will surprise us.**

One: On this day, like every other day, we seek to follow Jesus:

All: **we follow, believing Jesus will be with us; we follow, hoping Jesus will work through us.**

One: On this day, we lift our souls to God's Spirit:

All: **we open our hearts, that the Spirit may fill us; we open our hands, that we might be a gift to others.**

Invocation

Gracious and ever-present God, make each of us an instrument of your justice. Continue to weave us into a family, your Kindom, showing forth your power of healing, feeding, clothing and resurrection as evidenced through the life and ministry of Jesus. Bless us and our differences and sustain our courage to stand together in this present world. We call on you today to gather us in your love. Impart to us the knowledge and understanding to better know you and glorify your grace on each and every step of the journey of our lives. In the name of Jesus, who came in the name of love, let us now commit to shout with the voice of triumph and proclaim the love and grace of God to all the world. **Amen.**

Epistle Reading

Romans 5:1-8 NRSV

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

And not only that, but 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.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

We thank you, O God, that you have given us an enduring hope—one which cannot disappoint us or mislead us. We thank you, that through our faith in you and in your Son Jesus Christ, you enter into every believing heart and make new lives that have been torn asunder by the darkness of this world.

We pray today O God that those believers who are asleep may awake and know that salvation is nearer now than when they first believed. Help them, and us, to lay aside the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light that you bestow upon those who actively seek you day by day. Grant that their faith and ours may be fully alive.

We ask today, O God, for those who have lost hope and for those who have never had it. Grant to us and to those we lift before you in our hearts a new and abiding vision of what you have done, and what you are doing, and what you will do, to save and redeem your people and indeed the creation itself. Grant, O God, that all might see and believe and discover their purpose and the purpose of all that is and all that is yet to be.

We ask all this of you, O God, knowing that you are our hope and our salvation, a very present help in times of trouble, and the One whose purpose is to grant and new and abundant life to us and our world. Praise be to your name. **Amen.**

Hymn

Amazing Grace 143

Gospel Reading

Matthew 9:35-10:8 NRSV

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**.

Message – *Leading the Pack*

This morning's gospel lesson from Matthew opens with a problem, a need that was not being met. Jesus was on the road doing great things. He was preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of heaven in all the cities and villages. He was curing every disease and sickness that plagued the people he encountered. Jesus is setting the model for ministry. While many people come together seeking Jesus' assistance, they do not come together as a community. They do not come together as a collective; they gather as a crowd, driven by their individual needs. In many ways, they embody the heart of the call in Matthew.

Theologian James Bailey writes about this call in his book, *Church as Embodiment of Jesus' Mission*. He states, "In Matthew's narrative, the crowds are depicted as needy in search of food and healing..." Jesus was answering this call, he was doing great things. Yet while he was saying what needed to be said and heard, and solving the needs at hand, he was one man. He saw the impact he was having, yet there were so many in need of his message and

actions, he could reach but a fraction in person. He had compassion for those around him who were harassed and helpless, yet how could he make a real difference for numbers such as those? How could he take the lead to get the job done?

In today's world, he would have no shortage of resources to address this. There is no shortage of books, seminars, and courses on how to be an effective leader. But unlike the works of Stephen Covey and others, Jesus wasn't looking for the seven traits to make him successful in business, or a super fancy planner to keep himself organized. His success in leadership was as a servant leader, one who excelled by how others rose up. His goal was a 100 percent turnaround. A lofty bar to aim for. The sheer size of it made it clear he had some staffing needs. But there were some very specific job duties entailed in such a position. James Bailey continues in his reflection on this scene in Matthew by stating, "...in contrast, the discipleship community is enabled to move beyond its own needs to be in ministry for others." Like Jesus, they need to check their own individual priorities at the door. This was a job focused on others, on the larger community.

So Jesus takes on his initial group of staff, and a more disparate group would be difficult to imagine: fisherman and a tax collector, a radical revolutionary, among others. They are not ones that would stand out as leadership material by the standards of the day. Yet what they did have in common was the commitment to the primary mission, to proclaim the good news that the kin-dom of heaven has come near, and to resolve the problems that caused those in need to suffer. It was a mission all about the needs of others, so much so that they were to head out with basically the clothes on their backs, relying themselves on the generosity of others.

In the verses after the reading today, Jesus tells them to head out with the very basics, and warns them that it won't be an easy walk in the park. It will be frustrating, with successes, and failures. But they are to stay focused on the mission. If they are successful, they should stay and work. If they aren't welcomed, they are to shake the dust off and move on. They also won't be winning any popularity contests either, as they will be "sheep in the midst of wolves." What they have to say is not going to go over well with those in power, because it threatens that power, that very way of doing things.

When you say that the least of these should be treated the same as those at the top, it won't be taken well by those who benefit at the expense of others. But that should not deter the truth they speak, nor will they lack for speech. The Spirit will be there to guide them as they face these trials and difficulties. And we know from history, it didn't go easy for them. Yet they stuck to the mission. They kept saying the things that needed said, and doing the things that needed done. They didn't mince their words, seeking to craft the right message that wasn't controversial, that was the socially acceptable and the proper polite thing to say. They didn't hold back because there are "more facets to consider" when faced with need and oppression. They stepped out and stepped in, and took charge and led, and made a DIFFERENCE.

Like Jesus, they encountered the crowds with individual needs, and led them to be a community of compassion for others. They were willing to take the lead, roll up their sleeves, and get to work. They were willing to recognize the value of the outcasts and downtrodden, to say that they mattered. And they were willing to accept the consequences of acting and speaking out for what was just, for what the kin-dom of heaven really looks like.

To paraphrase theologian James Bailey further, "For Matthew, the church exists to identify with needy people." The early church strove to meet that expectation. They were the ones who got out into the slums to work to alleviate poverty, who risked their own standing to fight for those who were lacking dignity and respect. They were the ones who risked their own health to care for the sick. The church clearly stood for something, they valued those that many did not, that to them, those people mattered. The church clearly stood for something then. Does it still today?

How is the church taking the lead with the outcasts and needy of today? Sadly, we still live in a world with those who are oppressed, with those who lead lives of struggle. With over 40,000 unhoused people in King County alone, with numbers increasing nationwide over the last three years, what is the body of Christ doing or saying about those in need? Do homeless people matter?

This week we are in the midst of Pride month, a month to remember and celebrate the events that sparked the LGBT human rights movement. Yet we now see a wave of new anti-LGBT initiatives and laws, sweeping the nation and reenergizing acts of hate and violence, making transgender people four times more likely to experience violent crime. What is being done by the body of Christ for these people in need? Do they matter?

These aren't comfortable topics for many of us to think about and taking the lead can be troubling to say the least. But this walk of faith was never promised to be easy, yet as Paul reminds us, it is through this very faith that we are justified. There's a reason we're told to "count the cost." How are we fulfilling our mission as disciples by staying silent, by taking the path of least resistance? How does that ease the suffering of the crowds we are sent to? I say that figuratively, because on any given Sunday morning we have within our own sanctuary people who are unhoused or people who identify as LGBTQ+, They need to hear and see that their lives matter, their whole lives, not just those two hours every Sunday morning. Affirming their value is about them, not us. We need to affirm their uniqueness as wonderfully created by God, and their value as individuals. All lives do matter, but all lives are not lived in the same circumstances. The one thing that is certain is that silence and inaction are not an option. To quote Elie Wiesel, "we must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference." When we watch the news, it seems like the world around us is falling apart. We see the hate and the anger, the dehumanizing portrayals of all who are seen as the "other." It seems like an epidemic of its own. The question is, what are we doing about it? How are we taking the lead? It could be argued that our silence has enabled what we are seeing now.

Elie's words certainly ring true for those who are fighting to be valued, to matter. Will we take our place in proclaiming and seeking the just kin-dom of heaven that draws near, supporting those efforts to free the oppressed and lift the fallen. Or will we just continue to go along in effective indifference? We can choose to take the lead, or continue to follow the crowd as we've largely done for far too long. What does matter to us and how are we showing it? We need to think about the answer to that question, and find our way to live it out as the body of Christ, fulfilling the mission we are called to. Amen.

Call to Serve

The Psalmist writes: I love our God, who heard my cries and prayers! Let us offer our gifts to God at this time, to support the life and work of the people of God in our community, and around the world.

As we listen to the following familiar hymn, let's think about what we are called to, and how we will answer God's call.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Holy One, accept these gifts and multiply them so that the wonder of your love, and justice and peace may be known throughout the world! **Amen**

Hymn *Take My Life* 389

Benediction/Blessing/Assurance

Benediction Prayer God of life, God of hope. God of all Lift us on your love like eagle's wings. Sustain us Guide us Heal us. Then send us forth into the world. That we may love as you love. Amen.

Postlude