

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd  
The Rev. Scott Trevithick

Date: June 14, 2020 Worship recording during COVID-19  
Lectionary Year A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 9:35-10:8

Title: Seeking God's Healing

Focus: Jesus went throughout the region, teaching, proclaiming the good news, and curing disease/seeking wholeness. Then and now, he summons disciples and authorizes them to similarly cure disease and sickness in their communities. Imbedded racism is a sickness from which we are called to seek God's wholeness and healing.

## Matthew 9:35-10:8

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." <sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

---

## What does this violence mean?

I'm recording on Thursday afternoon. It was Saturday night, May 30, now nearly two weeks ago, that I was watching local TV news and saw that general tension and anguish within the crowd here in this area at Reno City Plaza turned to acts of physical destruction. Over the course of the evening, from early on when it was still light out to approaching midnight, City Hall, the Reno Police Department, the Thompson Federal

Building, and a number of businesses in the downtown to midtown areas were damaged.

This was following the death of George Floyd, who died on Monday of that week, suffocated under the knee of Minneapolis police.

There had been an organized and peaceful protest in the afternoon in City Plaza. Observers there, including former Police Chief and now Acting City Manager Jason Soto, differentiated between that event and the people gathered there from what would happen later that evening. A story written for the Reno Gazette Journal characterized that difference:<sup>1</sup>

But as the peaceful demonstrators began to depart, a different group took over.

Here's a quote from Acting City Manager Jason Soto:

- "We saw them peel off when the peaceful protest ended. This was a group that all they wanted to do was create destruction."

I'm sure there's disagreement about who engaged in these acts of violence and about what their motive or intent was—if, indeed it was reflective of a particular goal—whether it was something organized or just impulsive action of the moment.

Watching on the television from my home, I'll tell you my first impression: the destruction that I saw on the screen didn't seem directly connected to the death of George Floyd and to that traumatic event as an emotional trigger reminding people of countless other acts of racially-charged injustice in recent years and over the decades, and, to be honest, over the course of American history.

- It seemed more like opportunism or destruction that had no more motive than vandalism.

## Wisdom from Dr. King

And yet I reflected on that initial impression—is that really it? Is it just destruction, or is there a message to be uncovered in that action?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advocated for nonviolent, direct action to confront injustice and to create momentum for change. He and the movement he led continually held teach-ins in which they would train people in nonviolent, direct action.

---

<sup>1</sup> Anjeanette Damon. "Reno police: Downtown destruction on Saturday was caused by organized out-of-staters" May 31, 2020.

In a speech he called “The Other America”<sup>2</sup> which he delivered March 14, 1968 in Grosse Pointe, MI, (and which was a theme or speech he delivered at other times as well) Martin Luther King described how a riot can be a social expression which can carry a deeper meaning:

...I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots.

“I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? ... It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.”

So, he did not support violent tactics, including riots, but he argued that the way to prevent rioting is to acknowledge and fix the conditions that people are rioting against.”<sup>3</sup>

### **“Letter from a Birmingham Jail”**

He says this explicitly and specifically in Birmingham, AL in 1963 in response to the eight white clergymen who circulated a public letter they called “A Call for Unity” to which Dr. King responded with “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail:”

“You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes.”<sup>4</sup>

So, while my first impression while watching the damage of physical buildings in downtown Reno was that it was primarily carried out by opportunists, I had to at least consider if there was a message to be drawn from it.

And as people, not so much in Reno, but around the country, expressed dismay about the damage and destruction of property, I wondered if there was more consternation expressed over the destruction of property than moral outrage expressed over the death of George Floyd.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gphistorical.org/mlk/mlkspeech/> “The Other America” was a theme or speech he delivered at different times and places. See Lily Rothman, “What Martin Luther King Jr Really Thought About Riots” April 28, 2015 in *Time*. <https://time.com/3838515/baltimore-riots-language-unheard-quote/>

<sup>3</sup> See author Lily Rothman’s comments from *Time* article.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from a Birmingham Jail [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

- Are people, or at least a significant portion of people, more outraged by property damage than they are by the death of a handcuffed black man, already subdued, who has the life drained out of him by the knee of an officer, pressed down on his neck for over 8 ½ minutes?
- Which is the greater injustice? Damaged physical property or the death of a human being?

It's not just a rhetorical question. It's one that people have addressed before—if not in an explicit argument, at least in what they have shown or done.

- Who are we seeing?
- What do we recognize?
- What injustices are occurring—some that draw our attention and some which we let go by without notice or comment?

Some have lamented the destruction of physical property and indignantly declared that people should be engaged in peaceful protest. Others have pointed out that when people have engaged in peaceful forms of protest, that they have been ignored.

I read in the last week or so how one person apologized for not seeing the peaceful protest of former Nevada Wolf Pack and NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick in this way. He wrote,

I owe you an apology Kaep. Four years ago you made a statement and I didn't agree with your platform. Many of my family members, and people I love, defended and died for the flag for which you knelt before. I was offended and openly critical of your protest.

I failed to lovingly come by your side and hear your heart. I looked at how you were protesting instead of why. As a result, your cry for help fell upon deaf ears. I'm sorry. Perhaps if I listened four years ago, things would be different today. Maybe if I joined you in your crusade we could have made an impact together. You chose to peacefully kneel and I condemned you. For that, I am sorry.

--Photographer Ryan Williams, May 31, 2020 on his Facebook page<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ryan.michaels.9615566>

## Jesus in Matthew 9 and 10

Let's get to today's Gospel reading from Matthew 9 and 10.

<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

On Tuesday, when our Bible study group reflected on the text, I asked them to focus on the verbs—the action words. The passage begins with Jesus as the subject of these sentences—he's the one doing the action.

What is he doing? (Look at the verbs.)

Jesus went throughout the region. . . The verbs that I identified as pivotal were

- Teaching
- proclaiming the good news
- and curing disease and/or seeking wholeness (all from v. 35).

Elaine, one of the Bible study participants, rightly highlighted the verb *saw*. “Jesus *saw* the crowds and had compassion on them” (Mt. 9:36).

I so appreciated her insight. This past tense verb *saw* or present tense *seeing* is a simple enough action, but it's so powerful because in some ways it's the starting point for all the other actions—of teaching, proclaiming the good news, and seeking wholeness for the community.

If you can't even see people, if you can't even recognize them, if you can't acknowledge them, then you can't be moved to compassion; you can't teach, proclaim good news, or seeking healing and wholeness.

Elaine's observation drew our attention to what I think is part of our cultural challenge now—it's our tendency to *not* see people; it's our tendency to see past people or deny or discount another person's experience because it's not our own. We make assumptions based on our own experience—those experiences may be true for us, but they aren't necessarily universally true—they're not true for all or they don't prove that what happened to you happens the same way for all. We make assumptions like, “Well, if they had just followed the rules, if they had just done what they were told, then that wouldn't have happened.” We try to explain away bad things rather than acknowledge that they happened. We assume that people must have done something to deserve what happened to them.

To put it in the language of this text: We don't see them.

## Jesus summons disciples

In this text, Jesus went throughout the region, teaching, proclaiming the good news, and curing disease/seeking wholeness.

The next thing he does is call disciples and commission them for service or ministry which authorizes them to do the same things which he was doing:

“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” (Mt. 10:1).

Then and now, Jesus summons disciples and authorizes them to similarly cure disease and sickness in their communities. Imbedded racism is a sickness from which we are called to seek God’s wholeness and healing.

## Seeing Others

I think that engaging in this ministry of seeking wholeness in our communities has to begin with that overlooked key verb: **See**.

Are we able to see another, acknowledge their perspective as valid, identify with their concern as though it were our own? Jesus *saw* the crowds and had compassion on them. . . Are we able to truly see others and likewise have compassion?

I want to close with two stories or examples of *seeing* another as an entry point for engaging in additional acts of service or ministry or compassion along the path of seeking justice:

## Seeing in the Hospital

I read today of a COVID-19 patient in the hospital in Orlando and a hospital housekeeper who *saw* each other and healing was the result.<sup>6</sup>

The first thing that hospital housekeeper Rosaura Quinteros noticed was his fear. Jason Denney lay alone in his pressurized room in the hospital. He had a severe case of Covid-19, and it looked like he was losing the battle. A Catholic priest came to administer last rites. He had said goodbye to his family via FaceTime.

But Quinteros, a hospital housekeeper, urged Denney not to lose hope. She told him his life was in good hands, both the doctors' and God's. She said God was not done with Denney and encouraged him to keep fighting.

---

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Burke, CNN Religion Editor, “He was a Covid-19 patient. She cleaned his hospital room. Their unexpected bond saved his life” Posted at CNN June 11, 2020.  
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/11/health/orlando-hospital-coronavirus-patient-housekeeper-wellness/index.html>

A housekeeper from Guatemala and a retired Air Force colonel met in a hospital room in Florida. And slowly, one began to heal the other.

"I don't think she realized at the time what she was doing for me," Denney told CNN in recent interview. "She was saving my life."

Though English is not her first language, Quinteros said she and Denney quickly formed a bond. For six days, she became a ray of light in his suffocating darkness.

- "I felt bad for him," she said, "and I wanted to make sure that he knew he was not alone." "When a patient is treated with compassion and love," she said, "language is not a barrier."

### **Hospital housekeepers fulfill an unsung need**

The article which I read summarizes a part of the story: "They are sometimes called "invisible" workers, the custodians and housekeepers who clean and restock hospital rooms. But while we often don't see them, they see us."

While doctors, nurses and chaplains have rightly been hailed as heroes for their brave efforts during the coronavirus pandemic, the work of hospital housekeepers has been just as vital, said Dr. Neil Prose, who is a professor at Duke University's Global Health Institute.

- Prose: "the work of housekeepers in providing emotional support to patients and their families has become more important than ever."

He said custodians are often ignored by doctors and other high-level hospital staff. But after studying their role and making a short documentary about them, he realized how crucial they are.

- "We quickly realized that they often interact with patients more than physicians do," Prose has said, "and they do so with great compassion."

Denney, for one, knows how important a hospital housekeeper can be.

A few days after he left Dr. Phillips, Denney asked the hospital for Quinteros' number and sent her a text thanking her. He hopes to meet her family and take them out for dinner.

"I would love just to see her again and say thank you," he said. "People don't realize that in their brief engagements with other people, the words you say matter. And in the situation I was in, they really matter."

Thanks be to God that these two, Rosaura and Jason, saw each other. Her compassionate care brought healing to him.

## The Holy Friendship of Val and Demetrius

One of the responses I received after sending a letter to the congregation about the events of last week was from church member Val. She told me about an unlikely friendship which has been a mutual gift to her and Demetrius for the last 20 years and has, in the words of this text, helped her to see things in a way she otherwise couldn't.

Twenty years ago, in the community in which she lived at the time, Val returned to college as an adult learner. She was 20-25 years older than most of the students around her and she felt out of place, wondering if she could meet the goal that she had set for herself.

She, in her mid-40's at the time, a white woman who was a mom, developed an unlikely friendship with Demetrius, around 25 years younger, and a 6'9" star basketball player on the school team, or, as Val said Demetrius would refer to himself, "a big black guy."

Here are some highlights of their story:

- He has become, over 20 years time, "my nearest, dearest, and closest friend in the entire world."
- He was originally *my* friend but became a dear loving friend to [my husband] Tom and all my children (most especially to Jacqui).
- We have had many deep conversations/debates about everything under the sun—from religion to abortion to rape and everything in between. We've had conversations about what really constitutes racism.
- We've talked about when he's been stopped driving in a neighborhood he didn't "belong in"—mine.
- And how he was stopped walking through a field minding his own business (he ended up on the ground with a gun pulled on him because someone found a dead animal nearby).
- We talked about him growing up with the sounds of gunfire as he fell asleep each night.
- We've talked about me being (up to that point) the only white woman who had ever spoken to him (He was 19, when we had that conversation).
- And this whole time, I did not "get it." I remember talking about never turning on the location services (on my phone) because nobody had the "right" to keep tabs on me and expressing my surprise that he would be so "careless." He said, "sometimes it's more important to prove where I wasn't than it is to be private about where I was." I turned my location services on after that conversation.
- He moved into the same neighborhood my youngest daughter lived in (a nice upscale middle-class neighborhood). Once you entered the development, you



had to drive 5 minutes to get to her house. He bought a house in the front of the development, but mentioned that he wished he lived further in. I asked him why he'd bought "in front" he told me it was because he knew he made "white people" nervous when he drove through their neighborhood and he didn't want to do that. That was the first time I understood "white privilege." My point of this long email is to tell you that, for the first time ever, I feel ashamed that I haven't done more than to simply love him and listen to him and tacitly support him.

Val expressed some regret that it took her some time to, as she put it, "get it," meaning to understand the imbedded racism which was a part of the day-to-day experience of Demetrius and which she herself not only had never experienced, but was slow to see it through him.

- She sent me a current picture of Demetrius, his wife Marlana and their sons Arlen and Corey and said "We should all be so lucky to have friends like these."

Their unlikely friendship, when age, stage in life, gender, and race were all factors that could have kept them from connecting, has been a gift of grace to them both.

#### **Here's what she said about Demetrius seeing in a new way:**

For his part, he thanks me for giving him a different "view" of who he wanted to be as an adult man and how he wanted to live, and what he'd have to do to achieve it. We never talked about those things until after he'd achieved them. I did not mentor or guide him in any intentional way, but he says it was how we treated him that made all the difference in his life. How simple is that? It's how we treated each other—that became our best gifts to ourselves and to each other. We're both in places in our lives that the other one made easier to get to—by simply be treating the other in a way that said, "you belong here."

### **Seek the Healing in the Community Which God Intends—Start by Seeing Others**

In today's Gospel text, Jesus went throughout the region, teaching, proclaiming the good news, and curing disease and seeking wholeness. Then and now, he summons disciples and authorizes them to similarly cure disease and sickness in their communities.

May we respond to the call of Jesus to seek God's healing in our communities. May we begin, by God's grace, with *seeing* those around us, that we might be moved with compassion.

## Closing Prayer

As I draw the sermon to a close, I invite you into a brief prayer I wrote when responding to Val about her friendship with Demetrius, which Val herself will pray:

Thanks be to God for friends like Demetrius Jenkins.

Thank you for his patience and grace.

Help us to be ready to listen, God of grace, to the experiences of others which are not our own--to not discount them simply because they haven't been our experiences. And, as we listen and learn, may we find ways to grow in our understanding and to seek the beloved community you intend for us. Help us to recognize that some like Demetrius suffer indignities based on fear and suspicion that range from social slights to their own deaths, while others of us benefit from a status or position conferred on us.

Forgive us, gracious God, and help us to follow in your way.