

February 4, 2018

Entrusted with a Commission

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

AMEN

SERMON

The gospel reading for Mark this morning is a story that I think is pretty familiar to all of us. Jesus, after teaching in the synagogue, he and the four disciples who were with him, go to the home of Simon. We know him better as Peter. His mother-in-law is there with him, whether she lived there all the time or not we don't know. But she was sick, she had a fever, could be the flu. And they immediately tell them she's sick, she's not feeling well.

And Jesus' first act is to go and take her by the hand, lift her up, and her fever goes away. She is made well. That's a pretty common theme in the ministry of Jesus. He goes places and he has a message. First and foremost, he has a message. The kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe. It becomes an invitation to be part of the kingdom of God that is represented in his very being. But always with that when the sick in the area are brought near to him or whether he encounters them on the road. His compassion for the individual leads him to heal, make whole.

Whether it be a physical healing some kind of illness or disease or in the case of many of his encounters, demons, evil spirits that are a part of the individuals. And Jesus casts them out to make the person whole again. To free them from that imprisonment from the demon, from the

evil spirit. And invariably, once word gets out that that happened. Then everybody who is sick starts coming.

After Simon's mother-in-law is healed, at sundown after the Sabbath has finished and people could move about and do stuff. They all came to Simon's house. And they brought with them all who were sick and all who were possessed by demons. And it doesn't say exactly but we assume that Jesus spent a good amount of time that night healing those who were sick, casting out the demons. And I'm sure was happy to do that. He wanted the people to be well and he wanted the people to be whole.

But before anybody else got up, while it was still very dark, Jesus gets up and goes out and he goes to a deserted place. And that is another recurring theme that we see in the life of Jesus. When he has been dealing with large crowds, teaching, preaching, healing. He goes off by himself and he prays. And we never know exactly what he is praying for.

You know, when you've been doing this for 36 years almost, you play around with some of that, what the scriptures don't say. And I have a pretty strong feeling that Jesus when he would go out after he had been healing, after he had seen the brokenness of people with the demons, when he saw the illnesses. I think he would go out and pray that the humanity of Jesus and want to be clear. Want to be led.

This is so important to heal those who are sick and to make whole those who were broken. But he had a purpose and that purpose was to go out through all the land and to call people to repentance, and call people to an understanding, to a forgiveness, and invite people to come and be a part of the kingdom of God that was represented in who he was. This Jesus who was both human and divine. So, I have a sense that he would go and he would pray, that humanity of Jesus would pray, to

make sure that he was being obedient. To make sure that he knew which step to take next. Which invariably led him to the cross.

So, when the disciples finally find him in this deserted place, I have a sense that they wanted to stick around. I mean this was home for the two sets of brothers. Capernaum was home. And they would have been happy to stay there, they were people that they knew, family. But Jesus says, "It's time to go on. We have to go to the other town. We have to go to all the towns because the message is the important part. The message of the kingdom of God breaking into the world is the important part and everybody needs to hear that message." And so, they go on. They take the next step in the journey.

I believe that this is because Jesus is in the words that we heard in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he was entrusted with the commission. The humanity of Jesus was entrusted with being the Savior of the world. And to accomplish that task, he needed to go, and he needed to teach, and he needed to heal, and he needed to call for repentance. And so, he had to keep going.

I think that's a really important phrase that we hear Paul say in his letter to the Corinthians. "For I am entrusted with a commission." Paul understood that he out of all the people, being a Pharisee, being a persecutor of the church. When he encountered the risen Lord, he was entrusted with a commission. That he was the one that God chose to go and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lands beyond Israel, to the lands beyond the land of the chosen people of God. And he was not limited in his commission to just those who were Jews living away from the land of Promise. He was entrusted with commission to bring the good news of the gospel. This Jesus who was both human and divine. Who was son of God, who was Messiah, who was Christ. Who died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and invites everyone to become a

part of the community. This ecclesia, this kingdom of God on earth that will open itself up to the kingdom of God of eternity.

He is entrusted with a commission. And the church in Corinth was one of the places that he has lived that out. Where he had shared the gospel, where he has invited both Jew and Gentile to become a part of this community, this ecclesia, this church. So that they could then live out and be entrusted with a commission. They are called to be the body of Christ, they are called to be that community in the world that changes the world. Just as Paul is going from place to place in bringing that community together. They are then entrusted with the commission to go and do likewise. To bring others into this community. To invite them to be a part. To bring peace to places where there is not peace. To care for those that society says are not worth our attention and not worth caring about. To go and be with those who are sick. To be with those who are in prison. To let them know God's love for them. To be present with them in their sickness, in their imprisonment, in their brokenness. And to invite them to come and be a part of this new community of God. This community called the church. So that they can be made whole. So that they too can know the love of God.

So that they too can be entrusted with a commission. And that commission is what we hear at the end of the gospel according to Mark. The great commission to go and make disciples, to go and make disciples. To be the voice, to be the ones entrusted in the name of the church. To go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And I will be with you always until the end of the age. Jesus's promise, the risen Lord's promise to us. This is so important because we are that community, we are that ecclesia. We are the ones who are entrusted with the commission. Ones we have heard that good news, that gospel.

Once we have felt that being made whole. Once we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives to help direct and empower us. Then we are entrusted to go into the world, to fulfill that commission. To share with others the love of God. To be with others in their brokenness. To be present with prayer. To be present with the gospel message. To be present as one who is not afraid. One who is willing to give out of our abundance to those who have little or nothing.

To bring a sense of peace in the midst of turmoil. That's what we do. That's what we are called to be as the church. That's what it means to be entrusted with that commission. It doesn't mean that you have to go out and preach the gospel on the street corner. Of course, if you want to do that, give it a shot. You might be good at it.

The vestry met yesterday, we had a vestry retreat. And one of the things that I asked the vestry to think about in the days preceding and to share at the retreat are what are the gifts and talents that you bring to the vestry? And beyond that really, to the church. And I always ask that question. And it's always difficult for people to answer. People are reluctant to acknowledge their own gifts and talents. We may say that yes, I too believe that I am entrusted with the commission. To go and be the church in the world. To bring peace where there is no peace. To help bring wholeness where there is brokenness. To be present with those who others find it difficult to be present with.

But to acknowledge that we have gifts and talents to perform those tasks. People are reluctant and most of them were yesterday as well. But it is something that I would ask you as well. What are your gifts and talents? How do you fulfill that commission? That you are entrusted with by God, by Jesus Christ as a member of the ecclesia, as a member of the church.

And I can tell you that I see it being fulfilled every day, every day in this congregation. I see people who are not afraid to go to the hospital to visit those who are sick. Now if you do that, you say why would I be afraid to do that? Trust me when I say, a lot of people are. They find it difficult to go into the hospital. And they find it difficult to be with someone because they don't know what to say. They are afraid they will say the wrong thing. Sometimes they don't realize that it's enough to be present. To cross that door and go in.

Everyday I see members of this congregation feeding those who have had difficulties in their lives, who are members of the congregation. And providing a meal, one less thing to worry about. One less thing that they have to do because they are busy taking care of someone else or they themselves are busy healing. Every Sunday I see people bring food out of the abundance that they have so there will be food available at Sharing and Caring for those who have no food. Who will go hungry if that offering from abundance is not offered.

It's important to acknowledge two things. One, that we have gifts and talents given by God. What yours is may be different from mine, may be different from yours. And that's why we are embodied. That's why we each have our place. That's why we all are entrusted with this commission. Because any one of us cannot fulfill it. Together as a body we can, and we do.

You are entrusted with commission. Go and make disciples. We do that by being present. We do that by not being afraid to say we are Christian. I am a Christian. I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ. What was it that Michael Curry was saying? "I love Jesus and I'm proud to be an Episcopalian." That's not bad. If we can share the love of God. If we can share being a follower of Jesus Christ in the world today, then we have taken steps to fulfill the commission with which we are

entrusted. To go and make disciples. To be the ecclesia, the community of the church and the world so that we might bring the peace that God offers. So that we might feed the hungry. So that we might help the poor. So that we might visit the sick and those in prison. So that we can be the church.