

Sunday, JUNE 18, 2023 ***“Mission and Ministry on the Move”***

Genesis 18:1-5 Romans 5:1-8 Matthew 9:35 to 10:8, 9-23

There is a wonderful story as told by E. Carver McGriff, about Saint Francis a thirteenth century monk who decided to go on a preaching mission into the nearby village. He shared his plan with the other monks and invited a young novice to go with him.

As the day progressed, on their way into the village they passed an injured man and Francis promptly stopped, saw to the poor fellow's needs and arranged medical care for him. Next they walked a little further and soon passed a homeless man who was near starvation and dehydration. Francis stopped his journey and ministered to the hungry, thirsty homeless man and helped him as he could. Throughout the day, Francis saw people in need and lovingly cared for them as best he could. As the sun was starting to set he told his novice friend they needed to return to the monastery for evening prayers. But the young man said, "Father, you said we were coming to town to preach to the people." Francis smiled. Then he said, "My friend, that's what we've been doing all day."

This is ministry –faithful evangelism at its most faithful- meeting people where they are and what it is that matters. It is ministry where numbers are not kept, people are not worried about how many people’s lives are touched but that others’ are receiving God’s blessings. This is ministry and reaching out in Christian kindness in its basic form- sharing the love of God amongst God’s creatures. Showing love instead of talking about it. But how do we understand this in 2023- we are not 13th century monks on a ‘preaching mission’ but people who live in cities, towns, villages; in retirement communities, nursing homes, living in new neighbourhoods with mixed types of families of all sorts. And we are people who are on a mission and ministry which is ever moving and changing.

So how do we describe what Mission and Ministry is all about? When needed, we look to what those who were lifted up as righteous and good and what they taught us about living faithful lives.

Abraham and Sarah are great examples of doing ministry on the move. They had packed up everything and moved to a place yet unknown. They are near Mamre and living in a tent. The campground had to be fairly large because Abraham saw some visitors approaching the tent a fair distance away and ran to them and greeted them. Right away, we see some ideas of what they are doing—they greet the strangers amongst them, bowed in their presence in honour of their visit. Abraham showed them hospitality: ‘let me’ he said, “bring water to refresh their feet, to have a rest and to get you something to eat”. The visitors agreed to this. So Abraham then went to Sarah to get her to make flour cakes, to the herd and gave the servant a calf to prepare for a meal. He also gathered curds and milk together. When everything was ready he set this food in front of them and they ate. They ate well and asked for Sarah. Abraham told them that she was in the tent. One of the visitors then told them that in

due time they would return and they shall have a son. Sarah heard this statement and laughed out loud.

God heard Sarah laugh and asked Abraham why did laughed? Sarah knew that she was too old to have children. But God asked is anything to wonderful for the Lord? Sarah denied she had laughed but God said, yes you did!

So in this story, we see ministry occurring- Abraham sees visitors- strangers; welcomes them, has the servants make them comfortable and then prepares food for them. They eat well and one of the strangers comments that Sarah would bear a child within the year. She laughs at this thought—but all is possible with God. They take time to get to know each other and then laugh together- this is ministry based on what is physically needed—the first priority! Water, food, relaxation, friendship and social interaction.

Yet we think of ministry we often picture what Jesus told the disciples. In Matthew 9 and 10 Jesus is teaching the people and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. Jesus saw crowds of people and he had compassion for them- they were like sheep without a shepherd; Jesus saw that there was much to do- harvest is plentiful—workers are few.

Jesus then summons the 12 and commissions them to be like him to the people. He tells them to take nothing with them, what to pay attention to, good and bad. He tells them to proclaim the good news- the kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers cast out demons. Take nothing, leave nothing and discern if the house is worthy of your peace. If people do not welcome you- leave. Be careful out there!

Just for a moment think about your life this last week- we probably took wallets and purses wherever we went; we drove or were driven where we wanted to go; we saw people who were different from ourselves and yet what occurred- silence. We did not speak, say hello or at least make eye contact with others and smile. During the pandemic I found that people were making eye contact a lot because we couldn't smile at others. Now? There is no connection or rarely. Yet Jesus tells the disciple to discern for safety and peace; to show ourselves undressed for faith- ready to respond as Jesus asks and be simply ourselves.

As schools will soon end for summer vacations, there will be more people travelling around the city and roads. There might also be people out and about more than ever as it is now 3 years since lockdowns. People feel safe and ready to go. But where are people going? Anywhere to connect and see something new? Or they may be staying close to home and enjoying what is happening around them with people coming to them. Or maybe people will take time to rest, to have a 'sabbath' time and take in the heat and wonder of summer as it was intended to be. A time to grow and relax as well as a time to clear away the stress that always seem to build up. As we prepare for the summer our ministry changes so the question is, are we prepared to share Jesus in different ways? Are we willing to show others compassion and

love in what we say and do in Jesus' way and in his name? And are we doing this for the right reason?

How might we do this? How might we share that we belong here at Glenwood and are willing to give of our time, energy and joy for Jesus? And why do we do this? Because Jesus' death and resurrection made and makes a difference in our lives that we want others to know what he can do for them.

Paul in his letter to the Romans ch5 describes what God has done for us through Christ's death and resurrection. Paul writes about justification by faith- peace with God because of God's grace and that through this we can boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. We can also tell others as Paul describes this—suffering- endurance- character and hope. Each producing something a little better because when we come to know Jesus and grow in faith we change to become better people. But why is this important that Jesus died for us? Because God loved us and loves us still. God proves his love for us because Jesus died when we were called sinners we are able to be reconciled- made whole, safe and forgiven through him. And it is up to us as faithful believers in Jesus to tell others. This is the ministry of Jesus.

A man was driving home one afternoon when he saw a group of young children selling Kool-Aid on a corner in his neighborhood. They had posted the typical hand scrawled sign over their stand: "Kool-Aid, 10 cents per cup." The man was intrigued and thought it a good idea to support the young children. So he pulled over to the curb. A young boy approached and asked if he would like strawberry or grape Kool-Aid. The man placed his order and handed the boy a quarter. After much deliberation, the children determined he had some change coming and rifled through the amazon box until they finally came up with the correct amount. The boy returned with the change, then stood by the side of the car. And waited. He asked the man if he was finished drinking. "Just about," was the answer. "Why?" "That's the only cup we have," answered the boy, "and we need it to stay in business." It's difficult to operate a Kool-Aid business if you only have one cup. We sometimes make that mistake in the church and search for the one and only way to reach out to others.

Each one of us is different yet, all of us take the role of the cup which we share in Jesus. All who believe and have faith share that same cup of faith like Abraham and Sarah, the first disciples of Jesus, the believers in the early Roman church. This cup is what Jesus offered to us as the new covenant in his name. But we must be willing to share it. What it is that we share is based on who we are and what we might be able to do. All we must do is believe that the Spirit will touch the lives of other people so that they may come to faith and to trust Jesus. But we cannot limit ourselves. What is needed for all of us to share the cup is to let the Spirit lead and guide us. We are to be who you are with Jesus as you reach out to others in faith and with hope. This is our mission and our ministry and we are called to move!

Let us pray:

Holy God hear us as we pray to you. Call us to where we need to go and see the harvest before us. Help us share this cup with others as we tell others the good news in Jesus. Hear us as we pray to you SILENCE. In Jesus' name. Amen.