

**Pentecost 3A 2023**  
**Matthew 9:35 – 10:8**

**June 18, 2023**

**This is a pivotal moment in the ministry of Jesus. He has been teaching—more intensively teaching the disciples, but also teaching the crowds. He’s been telling them about the good news—the good news of the kingdom—the way the world will be when God’s will is done on earth as in heaven. And he’s been backing that message up with actions—healing people from diseases and illnesses—changing their lives. No wonder crowds are following him.**

**He looks at the crowds—the massive amount of human need—and instead of throwing up his hands at how much work it will be—he pivots toward his disciples. The ones who have been watching him and learning from him. He says to them, “There’s a lot of opportunity out there but *we need workers*. So, pray—ask the Lord to send out more workers.”**

**I don’t know how much time he gave them to pray but those prayers were answered. And it turns out the disciples are actually the *answer* to their own prayers.**

**Because Jesus calls *them* and sends *them* out. They are sent out with authority—with the capacity to do what they are sent out to do—which is exactly the same thing Jesus has been doing. Telling people that God is real and active in the world—*showing* them that**

**God wills healing and life by bringing healing and life in concrete ways.**

**Then--just like we are presenting our Mission Spending Plan today--Jesus presents *his* Mission Spending Plan. It's a lot shorter than ours: "You received without payment; give without payment."**

**I find it fascinating that this happens to be our Gospel reading today. I'm probably *not* going to be interpreting this as meaning we shouldn't have paid workers in the church, but I'd like to think about what it might mean for us to approach our ministry this way.**

**The starting point is what we have received—without payment. What has been given to us—freely—with no strings attached. It's really just another way to describe grace. And as much as we talk about grace—and how amazing it is—I think it's a lifelong process of believing it and living it. The idea that God loves us no matter what we've done or not done is hard to wrap your mind around because we rarely experience this kind of grace in our lives.**

**Being forgiven over and over again—knowing that there will never come a time when that well of forgiveness will run dry—it just runs so counter to the way *we* are that we can't believe that's the way God would deal with us.**

**But Jesus says it clearly— "you received without payment." You didn't pay anything or do anything to earn this utter and complete love and acceptance. It's just been given to you.**

**So, I think in Jesus's Mission Spending Plan, there's no accounting, which would free up a lot of our Treasurer's time if we went with this approach.**

**But there *is* a constant income stream. God is always giving to us. We each have experiences of God's unending giving in our own lives—and we have had so many in this congregation. We have had enormous generosity in people giving their time and using their gifts and skills in service of our ministry here. And we have had a long history of generous giving both by the living and those who left gifts after they died.**

**Honestly, there can't be many congregations of our size that have experienced so much generosity. So, even though we do *a lot* more accounting, we *know* this truth of receiving without payment—time and time again.**

**That's the income side of the Mission Spending Plan.**

**Let's turn to the expense side. How does Jesus approach the question of where and how to spend on the mission?**

**Jesus looks at the massive human need around him—and says “that's where we need to spend our time and energy.” “*When he***

*saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless.”*

**Compassion—not return on investment—is the motivating factor. The ministry efforts are not about building a bigger following or gaining more stature and respect. The spending is based on the needs of the people—not what they can or might do as followers of Jesus but just responding to their need. “Give without payment.” Give freely—not because people deserve it or did something to earn it but just because they *need* it.**

**A few weeks ago, Albert Herring shared a good news story with me, that I’d like to share with you.**

**When she was 4, Jamie West was placed in the first of what would be 94 foster homes because her parents weren’t able to care for her. Eventually, she ran away and became a homeless teen. Hungry and thirsty, she walked into a White Castle fast food restaurant to get a glass of water.**

**Jamie describes what happened. “This woman working there said, ‘Oh, Sugar, you poor thing — go get yourself cleaned up in the bathroom,’” she recalled. “I went in there and cried, then washed up. When I came out, there were these big sacks filled with slider hamburgers waiting for me.”**

**“The lady told me they were cleaning the grill and were going to throw everything away and she wanted me to have them,” she added. “I remember sobbing, then hugging her and grabbing the food and running away.”**

**“I wasn’t sure whether it was real.”**

**The same thing happened at various White Castles across the country, no matter how rough-looking she was when she walked in.**

**Jamie said, “I was always so grateful to them for treating me like a human being. It was a shiny spot at a very bad time.”**

**One day, Jamie went to live with her aunt who helped her heal and get to a stable place. She met Drew, the man who would become her husband. At the beginning of May—just a few weeks ago-- Jamie and Drew were married—and they got married in a White Castle restaurant. It was a medieval themed ceremony. There were stacks of sliders for 150 guests, a giant burger-shaped cake and flower girls who threw dehydrated onions instead of flower petals.**

**As I think about it, this welcoming of a hungry, homeless teen and giving away of bags of sliders must have been a corporate policy if it happened at every White Castle restaurant.**

**What a beautiful example of how God’s work of healing and restoration is done through so many channels. This giving didn’t depend on a generous manager or on the worthiness of the teen in need. It is an intentional policy—a mission spending plan—a way of**

**showing compassion. Jamie and countless other teens who wander from state to state, know that—wherever they are—if they see a White Castle restaurant, they will be fed. They will be welcomed to wash in the restroom. They will be treated like a human being.**

**Honestly, it sounds sacramental. Being fed with Holy Communion. Being washed in the waters of Baptism. Hearing the Word that you are loved and valued.**

**Wouldn't it be amazing if people in need—materially, emotionally and spiritually saw churches the same way?**

**We have a stunningly beautiful sanctuary and building that has just been restored so that it will be here much longer than any of us. As we look at the crowds with compassion—all those people outside of the walls of this beautiful place, Jesus is telling us to pray for workers to go out and make the Good News of God's work in the world real.**

**And just as quickly as the prayers of those first disciples were answered, ours will be, too.**

***We* are the workers.**

**After he called them, but before he sent them out, Jesus gave the first disciples “authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.”**

**Authority has several different meanings but I'd like to highlight two: "freedom" and "capacity".**

**Surely, in the unexpected gift we have received from Jeanne Buster, we have been given the freedom and capacity to bring God's healing and new life. I don't know what form that will take but I am struck by how much human need there is—and how material need is also combined with the need to be seen and treated as a human being. To be valued and loved. And when the church is the one doing this healing and restorative work—without saying a word—we proclaim the Gospel. With our actions, with our compassion and love, we say "Your life matters to God."**

**In closing, I want to circle back to the income side of Jesus' Mission Spending Plan—In addition to the enormous gift of life and never-ending love, God is giving the first disciples—and us—the gift of *being called to do this holy work*. Being able to be a part of God's restoring and healing work is truly a gift like no other.**

**We will live into this gift—each one of us in our own way—but I hope and pray we will each receive this opportunity for the gift that it is—that we will be a part of listening to God, to each other and to the needs around us over the coming months. That we will step up and step out in the ways we are uniquely able.**

**I am confident in the God who is leading us through the example of Jesus. I am hopeful and excited about what lies ahead. And I am grateful beyond words for all that God has given to us.**

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**