

Second Sunday of Pentecost

June 14, 2020

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A week or two ago I printed off the texts for this Sunday, Matthew 9:35ff and I was struck by vs. 36 - **When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And I was astounded.** That is what I am feeling. And I would guess that you too are feeling some of this.

I have read this text many times, and now approaching 40 years of ministry, I have preached on this text at least 13-14 times.

BUT NOW – with COVID-19 and all the ills that come with it, flooding in Mid-Michigan, hurricanes, economic woes, racial tension, and all the rest YES – I am feeling harassed and helpless like a sheep without a shepherd.

I get harassed when I forget to wear a mask, and I get harassed when I do wear a mask. I get harassed when I forget to stay 6 feet away, and when I do. Harassed by younger folks when I go out and they remind me I am in the vulnerable category because I am old, stay safe.

Helpless because I cannot control the virus and I cannot control other people. And helpless living in mid-Michigan where I could not control the weather and the rains came and they kept on coming. Helpless because the floods in mid-Michigan were caused partly by rain and partly by greed – The dam owner – Lee Mueller and Boyce Hydro neglected the dams.

Helpless because I could get the virus even though I wash my hands, wear a mask, disinfect the kitchen every morning, and stay home.

Helpless because I feel like we are back in the 1960's all over again when it comes to challenging racism.

I dream of a world where all can breathe freely without oppression.

Like sheep without a shepherd cause I work from home right now, I preach from home, I go to church from home, I talk to my grandson from home, and my father too. I can't see the people who shepherd me or those I shepherd. Sheep without a shepherd because I see political leaders making light of the virus, and not working to protect the lives of all people.

Sheep without a shepherd because I see very little leadership right now from elected officials on how to move forward in the conversations about race.

And sometimes I feel helpless, harassed, and like a sheep without a shepherd because we are living in an unusual time. There is a new normal, but it changes from day to day and everything seems out of control. An invisible enemy that some say cannot be stopped and others say it is a hoax.

And then we read Psalm 100 today – Make a joyful noise to the lord. And we still can't sing in church because it increase the spread of the virus.

What is a person to do??!!!

I read the second lesson from Romans 5: boast in your suffering, knowing that suffering produces hope..... I am not ready to God there. Intellectually I know that when we get through this COVID-19 Flood Racial Tension illness we will be stronger – especially if we have relied of God for hope and strength. But in my emotions and my gut feelings I am not there yet. I need Jesus!

ON the second Sunday after Pentecost, the Sunday after Trinity and all the big festivals – we go back for the summer and remember the story.

JESUS went about the cities and churches proclaiming good news and curing diseases. Then he called out disciples who were sent to the LOST SHEEP.

Jesus comes.

When we feel helpless – Jesus comes.

When we feel harassed – Jesus comes.

When we have no shepherd – Jesus comes and cares for us.

For the next few months in the Gospel texts we will hear the account from Matthew of Jesus caring for those who feel helpless, harassed, and without a shepherd.

There are many ways to go with the text for this Sunday, but for me, sheltering in place, contemplating going out, going back to worship, knowing that God is with us, God is with you and God is with me in the presence of Jesus is the word I need to hear.

Knowing that I don't have to have all life's problems figured out, knowing that I don't always get it right...is the word I need to hear.

I got to spend some time with my grandson the other day.

When he first started to walk, we played this game where he would run from across the room and jump into my arms for a giant hug. He has been walking now for more than a year and ½ and still – if I set on the floor and call – HUG he comes. Trusting I will catch him and surround him with my grandpa arms and everything will be alright. That is what God brings to us in Jesus at this moment. That childlike faith that when we come running to Jesus. Jesus puts out his loving arms, catches us and surrounds us with love.

The text says Jesus had compassion on the people when he saw them helpless and harassed. Jesus comes to us when he sees us struggling, harassed, and helpless. When we don't know where to go and what to do.

Jesus comes. There is no earthly shepherd that is immune to the virus. There is no earthly shepherd that is immune to racism. There is no earthly shepherd that can control floods and storms.

Jesus brings a different kingdom to us and offers us the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of forgiveness, the kingdom of hope, and a kingdom of faith amidst the storms and illnesses of life.

God sends Jesus to be the shepherd – when humans fail, when floods happen, when racism prevails, when viruses kill, and when we feel lost.

Jesus comes.

When the nation of Israel was looking for hope in a devastating time after they were made slaves in Babylon Isaiah brought a comforting word from God. A word of hope and that word is embodied in Jesus.

Isaiah 43 - When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you, you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.

Those words have been paraphrased by Michigan composer David Haas in the hymn YOU ARE MINE. We may not be able to sing in church yet. But I welcome you to sing this song at home, outside, or in the car. It is a reminder that God is with us in Jesus. And we are not alone.

"Do not be afraid, I am with you.

I have called you each by name.

Come and follow me,

I will bring you home;

I love you and you are mine."

