*Mission Of Faith*

Over the summer at Spiritus Christi one of our parishioners offered beginners pickle ball to the parish. So for 4 weeks after the 9:30am mass we would either go to the gym or outside in the back parking lot or begin to learn the game. The game began with two captains who were charged to pick their team. We stood waiting to see which team you would end up on as the captains called out name after name. I was of course hoping to end up on the winning team because I’ve always been a little competitive when it came to sports.

In the gospel today is the story of Jesus the captain of our faith picking his third of many teams he would choose throughout his ministry. The first team began as he walked along the sea of Galilee in Mathew’s gospel and saw two brothers Simon Peter and his brother Andrew fishing and casting their net where he offers that famous line after the invitation to follow him that he would make them fishers of people! Jesus will pick James, his brother John John, **Philip**, Bartholomew, **Thomas**, **Matthew**, **James** (the son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, **Simon the Zealot** and **Judas Iscariot** to start. In Marks gospel chapter 3:12-19 He goes up the mountain and summons this group to come to him. Appoints them apostles and sends them out to Preach and Drive out Demons!

In Today’s gospel of Luke we have another group! Jesus has appointed them and is sending them out to Preach and heal the world! 72 men and women sent out by Jesus on a mission.

Appointed and Missioned!

 To be appointed is to be designated for a special purpose, to be equipped in a specified way. So Jesus did some thinking about the gifts these disciples on his team had, and how well fitted they would be for the work he was sending them out to do. “ This Mission Of Faith”

A mission is more than a career or job opportunity. It is a passion, a calling, and a destiny. It isn’t something you pick. It picks you! Jesus in the gospel over and over again picks ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the world for God! Calling them to what is already in them to do. If you have ever felt called to something, a calling makes the work you do feel personal! You know that it is part of who you are. It etches out your purpose in the world, matching known and hidden gifts inside of you.

“Transforming the way you see the world, others and yourself!”

I think at 8 years old my calling to serve began. I realized an unusual desire to serve even though I didn’t fully understand it as my calling. I remember standing in my mother’s kitchen watching my siblings do the dishes. I wanted to help too. When I asked to help, they refused saying that dishes were not for the baby of the family. I felt left out and wronged. Determined, I made a proposition they couldn’t refuse. So I said to them “If you let me do the dishes, I’ll pay you.” I gave them one dollar and happily did the dishes! I felt so strongly then the desire to help, not to be left out. Perhaps it was a metaphor for being called to clean up messes we would make as human beings in the world. Cleaning up the mess of racism, sexism, homophobism, poverty and injustice.

All of which, as my calling evolved, I found myself a part of and passionate about ending it first as a lay minister, then as a clergy member and come this Saturday as a woman priest!

I realized that Jesus too was called to end oppression and that over and over again he keeps extending that invitation to us to join him through the work he sends us out to do!

This is Presbyterian Women’s Sunday. A day where you celebrate the work you have been missioned to do. Called too. You have been active in your church and community giving your time and talent to Jesus calling you too providing shelter and food for families through the Raihn Program, Providing for children in orphanages in places like Africa, providing food for the poor, serving families at funerals, sending love to shut ins on valentines day and assisting those preparing for communion among many of your ministries.

When you are called to mission work it’s not always easy. It will be filled with joys and challenges! We have a saying at Spiritus Christi that says when you go out to do justice work, don’t wear your best clothes!

Here these disciples Jesus sends out are living under roman occupation and hostile conditions yet, they somehow managed to maintain a heart of faith, hope and love. For God and for humanity! Jesus must have thought this was essential for future leaders. To have people who would not be discouraged by the adversity that was all around them, but could remain not only hopeful but, could feel that they could contribute to a shift somehow, despite their current conditions.

Their predicament is not unlike the moment in time we find ourselves in today, as the world prepares for a new administration with a leader that has some in our nation joyful while others are nervous and anxious about its future for the poor, the sick, the earth and its global warming, the plight of women’s rights, immigration, Community and law enforcement relations, race relations, and the many things we all care about.

While it is an uncertain time and we don’t really know what we are in for, we will have to wait and see. At the end of the day it doesn’t matter whose leading a country, a corporation or an organization because like these disciples are reliance as believers is in God. As each of us is called to this mission of faith to improve life for these vulnerable groups, it is important to know that we like these disciples are appointed for a special purpose as well to direct the course of our future together as members of Jesus team.

Jesus sends them out two by two to places they have never gone before, to people they have never seen before going house to house to preach the good news and bring healing to those who would welcome them in.

 This instruction of Jesus tells us that if we want our lives healed we have to be open to what is brought to us as much as we have to be open to share what we have been given with others. These 72 are sent out with their only reliance being that on God and the generosity of one another. The generosity of the human heart! So he tells them take no purse, no bag, and no sandals and know that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. Lambs are the only animals that don’t prey on other animals. When we go out to do our mission work we must always remember whom we are. We are lambs and not wolves!

This week, I had the opportunity to be part of another team Jesus was calling and being sent to one another answering their appointed call.

On Monday January 16th, Dr. Martin Luther King day I was part of a summit of law enforcement, clergy and community members coming together proactively to build relationships, connections and more justice in

community, county, urban and suburban policing as it relates to people of

color. This group of folks got together for a second time to dialogue about perceptions they had of one another with the goal of deepening relationships through intentional conversations that would lead to furthering the arc of justice in our community and surrounding areas. It was quite clear to me that I was in a room full of people who were designated for a special work and following their calling. This work had chosen them.

I sat in a room Thursday this week with the extended staff at our all day staff meeting with leaders who work in our parish and outreaches. There were about 25 or so of us. Each person was asked to go around and share a gift that they had. There were so many gifts in the room. The gift to take one day at a time, to build furniture, make pottery, have faith and trust in God, to sing, to dance, to be nonjudgmental. To love without conditions, to organize, to read, to play music, to live in their joyful side, to allow others to teach them etc. One person said, I have learned to not allow my love for others to be based on whether they meet my expectations or not, to offer them unconditional love regardless of whether they say what I approve of or act the way I expect because that is what Jesus did!

As we concluded going around the room it became quite evident that this bunch was appointed by God to do the work that they are doing. While they may have shared gifts like building furniture it was clearly translating into building lives. Gifts like dancing, singing and living in their joyful side translated into taking a light heart and creativity into their work with others. Loving without conditions, and committing to non-judgment of others translated into creating safe space for those they serve to grow and feel the love of God in their human frailty.

I walked away grateful to be on their team!

I thought here is another Jesus team appointed to change the world! We are all called to be on that team! When Jesus called forth the disciples in Mark’s gospel and sends this 72 our in today’s gospel, he was happy to send them forth to preach the good news and heal the world! They go together! We can’t just tell people it’s going to get better, we have to be part of making it better!

**Margaret Mead** American Anthropologist once said,

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens
can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

And Mahatma Ghandi said,  **Mahatma Ghandi**Hindu spiritual leader

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

This is what we have been missioned to do. Jesus has not just given the authority to change the world to the disciples we hear about in this story today. He has given it to us too.

Authority simply means -The power to make decisions.

Like these 72 disciples we can make decisions about creating more justice! Peace! Unconditional love, resisting division and oppression!

That is what Jesus team of disciples are called to do. We are team Jesus and that is what we are called to do too!

So as you hear Jesus calling these 72 names and sending them out to ministry, to mission work, to their calling, know that he isn’t stopping at 72. Hear him calling your name! Sending you forth to go out into the world and make a difference wherever you can. In the midst of adversity, anxiety, joy and fear! We can do it! Jesus is counting on us!

These disciples rose to the challenge and so can we! If you are wondering if you can sustain the journey don’t.

Why? Judas was on Jesus team even though he didn’t go the full way! Peter was on Jesus team even though their came a point where he followed him from a distance. It didn’t keep Jesus from calling them to his team and sending them. Jesus understood their limitations and allowed them to contribute as much as he could. So not even our limitations keep us off the team! We are called to this team through the eyes of love not perfection! It is that love that transforms the way we see others, the world and ourselves! Jesus final instruction is for them not to even worry about rejection. If you come to a place where they reject you, don’t hold a grudge, Judge or retaliate. Simply shake the dust from your feet and move on to the next place!

I have a 9 year- old grandson named Jordon who loves to hang out with me everywhere I go. One day I asked him. Why he likes to hang out so much with an old woman like me when he could be playing with kids. He simply looked at me and said, “ Because you don’t judge me.” God is like that with us. God doesn’t judge us. Jesus doesn’t judge us. He keeps calling us to this mission of faith! Jesus mission always moves us forward to bringing the kingdom of God near! So today, He is sending us out! So let’s go! Our world is waiting for us!