

Tracy Daub  
6/14/20--University Presbyterian Church  
Matthew 9:35-10:8

## GETTING BETTER

In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus has been going around to the cities of his region preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God and healing people. And into to these cities the crowds pour in and gather to see Jesus. All those people gather to seek healing, to seek guidance, to seek help, to seek hope. They are looking to Jesus to help make them better from so many of their afflictions in life--all kinds of afflictions of body, soul, and life conditions. And in the midst of conducting this ministry to these crowds of people, Jesus turns to his disciples and tells them to pray that God would send out laborers into the harvest. Jesus can see the great need before him. And so he tells his disciples to pray for laborers to work in God's fields. And *then* he promptly sends the twelve disciples out into God's fields--into the world--to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom and also giving them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness." And off they go. God's laborers, sent to help people get better.

These days the cities of *our* nation have been filled with crowds. We have watched and some of us have joined in the many protests taking place across our nation in response to the murder of George Floyd. Vast multitudes of people have gathered daily to voice their outrage--protestors carrying signs, protestors shouting, protestors crying, protestors singing, protestors dancing, protestors praying. I wonder if we might think about all those protestors across our nation, and even in other nations as well, not merely as protestors but rather as laborers in the field of the Kingdom of God. I'm not talking about the rioters, those who do violence and create

harm. I'm talking about the vast crowds of *peaceful* protestors. What if we thought of the protestors as laborers in the Kingdom of God, working to make us better.

You will recall that the laborers Jesus sent out into the land, his twelve disciples, were given the work of proclaiming the good news of God, and of curing the sick and casting out unclean spirits. Now, we might also think about those protestors walking in the streets of our cities these past days as people who are trying to address a deep sickness in our land. We thought the Covid-19 virus was a problem, but there is a far more sinister pandemic that has infected our nation since its inception--the virus of racism. It is an unclean spirit for sure--an unclean spirit that needs to be cast out from our hearts and minds, cast out from our government policies and social practices. To work against racism, to speak against racism is to promote the values inherent in the Kingdom of God.

There are some in our nation that want to portray the protestors all as troublemakers. But we Presbyterians should have a more favorable response to protestors. After all, the word "protest" forms the very word "Protestant." We Protestants came about because some Christians a long time ago protested against things they saw as wrong in the Church. But those early Protestants not only stood against things they didn't like, they also stood *for* things they believed in. That's what protestors do. They stand against a wrong and they stand in favor of an alternative. In other words, they want reform. And that is another word near and dear to the Presbyterian heart. Presbyterians grew out of the Protestant Reformation, a time when Christians were striving to reform the practices of the Christian church. So, protesting and advocating for change are part of our history and in fact our theology. We embrace a God who not only seeks to reform but a God who works to *transform* us and our world. It's not just enough to tinker around the edges of brokenness. We need *transformation*. That is the Easter good news. God

seeks to transform us. Jesus came to show us a *better* way. And in the midst of all the bad news and heartbreaking news, *that* is our hope. God seeks to transform us and our world.

Jesus tells his disciples to pray for laborers. And we busy Christians are used to thinking of ourselves as God's laborers. But maybe we busy Christians, especially us white Christians, maybe we first need to consider ourselves as the sick ones that the laborers were sent out to heal, the sick ones Jesus came to heal. We are in need of being healed of the racism that is both conscious and unconscious in ourselves, of the intrinsic racism in our systems and institutions that we accept because the status quo works for us. This nation cannot get better until the sick accept that there is indeed a virus that is making us ill. It is causing grave harm.

And one of the important ways we come to understand the scope of the virus of racism is by listening to the voices of those who are most impacted by America's racism problem.

Today, I invite you to attend to the preaching of the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III. Dr. Moss is the pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago and I had the privilege to hear him preach a number of years ago at the Chautauqua Institution. He is a powerful preacher. I have attached to the congregational email for today links to two sermons Dr. Moss has recently preached following the murders of Amaud Arbery and George Floyd. I hope you will take the time to listen to either or both of those sermons as part of your worship this morning. Dr. Moss is one of God's laborers, who preaches the good news of the Kingdom of God to us and works to cast out the unclean spirit that has so long and profoundly sickened our land.

The good news today in the midst of all the bad news is that God desires for us to get better. God sent Jesus so we may get better. God raises up laborers to show us the way to get better. God has not abandoned us to sin, and affliction, and brokenness. As hard as it is

sometimes to see or even to believe, we Christians cling to hope, the hope we have in God's transforming power and presence.