

## “Healing Society”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
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Psalm 48

Mark 6:1-13

‘We had heard about it,

and now we have seen it in the city of our God, the LORD All-Powerful.

This is the city that God will let stand forever.’ Psalm 48:8

Let us pray... O God,

May our society seek to become that great ‘city’ and find healing just like  
anyone who needs healing and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

Amen

There’s always been a tension within the Christian Church  
about its role in society – whether or not it should be  
an agent for change or just a place for worship.

In our country, we have separation of church and state  
and that is certainly wise given the terrible history  
of the Reformation and the wars that followed  
in Europe and its colonies throughout the world.

Any religious group that thinks God is on their side alone  
and they come into power in a society, is bound for trouble.

But the great religions of the world all have compassion at their core,  
regardless of what they say about Ultimate Realities  
like “God”, “Heaven”, or the “Higgs Boson particle”.

So, individuals who are guided by spiritual principles  
no matter what their religious affiliation,  
can even be preferable as political leaders –  
though it’s always a matter of goodwill.

Meanwhile, everyone’s talking about the healthcare bill  
or the Affordable Care act – otherwise known as ‘Obamacare’.

Battle lines are drawn –

not only along party lines, but by the dictates of pride, as well.

And such issues always seem to be presented as an ‘all or nothing’ option –  
as if compromise was on the level of ‘collaboration with the enemy’.

Still, there are very compelling reasons to support either side,  
if only we could cherry-pick those truths  
that would lead to a common course for action.

Willard, p.2

And besides healthcare, there are concerns about joblessness, war,  
immigration, racial profiling, abortion, gay marriage, energy,  
Wall Street, the environment, bullying, education –you name it.

But at the very least, there's hope in all of this

*because people are talking about these things* and that means  
there is the possibility of making choices that lead to change.

The system is working – to some extent, with tentative thanks to the media  
which allows for various and sundry groups to express their views.

We need compromise or we will stay polarized in a festering gridlock.

And for many people the only thing that seems to matter  
is whose faction is in power –

and isn't that why we have 'separation of church and state'?

We all need to remember that the 'other side' doesn't just go away  
after an election.

Whoever doesn't win will still have to be reckoned with,

They will still have to be listened to...

Today's Gospel lesson follows the sequence of that remarkable Sabbath day,  
filled with events that portrayed Jesus at the height of his powers  
as well as underlining his principle challenges:

First of all, there is Jesus' conflict with the political religious authorities  
because of traditions that were numbing peoples' hearts.

He bluntly tells his opponents he's here to rescue 'the goods'

from 'the strong man' - and literally does that later on

by freeing a person from spiritual oppression

who was otherwise too strong to be subdued.

And he chose 12 disciples to be his missionaries

who – in today's story, were sent out with the power to

heal individuals and even communities just like he was doing.

"No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey,  
you're welcome here.'

But that was not the case for Jesus when he returned to his hometown  
of Nazareth.

So, he sends his disciples to go forth, two by two,

and they are not to take any money or bread or extra clothes.

And in a later Gospel event when he sends out 72 missionaries,

he even tells them not to get involved with fellow travelers.

They are to go straight to the villages and seek refuge in peoples' homes

and not to go from house to house –

where the food might be better, for example.

Willard, p.3

They are not to prey upon peoples' goodwill.

And for that matter – even though they are observant Jews,  
Jesus tells them to eat whatever the family eats –  
'Take it and like it.'

We now know that the Roman city of Sepphoris in Galilee  
was a cosmopolitan center of trade that was maintained  
by taxing the locals, kicking those who couldn't pay to the curb,  
and absorbing their lands.

If these people couldn't get work as laborers – like potters for example,  
they became beggars, prostitutes, bandits, or insurgents.  
Or they might even have become cynics.

I don't mean they became "cynical",  
but rather traveling speakers who debated their philosophy  
and begged for food and shelter.

This was a 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE revival movement  
similar to that of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE Greek cynics.

It is thought that Christ and his disciples patterned their missionary efforts  
after these cynics.

Dale Suttoff is a passionate student of this particular era of Israel's history  
and this theory that Jesus was a cynic.

And as we heard from the text today,  
the disciples go out and are taken in by these communities  
where they cast out demons & perform healings through prayer  
to help their benefactors in their particular needs  
and pay the rent, so to speak.

They helped to mend the rift between the homeowner and the homeless.

And then, these landed people were ready to hear the Word of God  
that is competitive with the cynics and their "rap" on the street.

And in this way they sowed the seeds of what would become  
the planting of the Christian church –  
First, among the Jewish settlements of the Middle East,  
then the Greek islands, ancient Turkey,  
and on to Rome and beyond.

This movement emerged again even after the Christian "Church"  
became established as the Roman Empire's state religion.  
In the Medieval era of Christendom when great cathedrals were built,  
Francis of Assisi and his followers took the same path as the cynics.

Willard, p.4

And in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there were ‘New Franciscans’ –  
a term for young adults who were unmarried and unaffiliated  
who just went out to serve God as church workers,  
usually in youth ministry.

That was me from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.

Otis Moss III the pastor of Trinity UCC in Chicago  
says that our congregations need to be  
“committed”, “critical lovingly”, and ‘compassionate’  
when it comes to  
‘[moving] out into a community and reach a different generation’.

He goes on to say,

‘We need to have an *I-Pod* version of evangelism –  
meaning that we are mobile in our movement’.

How does that translate for us here at UCC at The Villages?

That means we have to find out where the need is and reach out to meet it –  
where is the rift in our society right here in this community  
and the communities that we as individuals touch  
beyond The Villages.

People may know what they want, but they don’t know what to do.  
so you say, “What can I do?”

Ask people what they need –  
and don’t just talk, but listen, too.

Even ask yourself what do you need?

Loneliness is the common denominator everyone must deal with.

Well, what did the disciples do?

They reached out, they helped people, they healed someone,  
and they prayed.

Go out and do something – get involved by volunteering.

And engage people in conversation.

In talking about these issues,

we all may get insights about how to do a certain thing.

Some may think of a better way ‘for a better fit’.

Willard, p.5

To heal society, it's a job that 'starts from the grassroots and grows up'  
to quote a friend who goes on to say,  
'When you give, you always get more back.  
When you heal, you get healed, too.  
Don't start big, but start small.'

And friends, that's just like the mustard seed in Jesus' parable.  
Or like that story of a man who planted 50 acorns every day  
and in 5 years he had a forest of saplings.  
And in 30 years, those trees brought back water  
and people to a desolate land.

There is much that we can do to heal our society and our world  
by first simply talking about it and listening to each other.  
And you have the advantage of prayer – talking to God  
like Jesus and his disciples did.  
So, start small, keep at it, just do it.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Psalm 48 celebrates God's Kingdom  
as a great city that can be both beautiful and secure for all people,  
yet frightening, as well, to its enemies.*

Psalm 48

<sup>1</sup>The LORD God is wonderful!

He deserves all praise in the city where he lives.

His holy mountain, <sup>2</sup> beautiful and majestic,  
brings joy to all on earth.

Mount Zion, truly sacred,  
is home for the Great King.

<sup>3</sup> God is there to defend it and has proved to be its protector.

<sup>4</sup> Kings joined forces to attack the city,

<sup>5</sup> but when they saw it,  
they were terrified and ran away.

<sup>6</sup> They trembled all over like women giving birth  
<sup>7</sup> or like seagoing ships wrecked by eastern winds.

<sup>8</sup> We had heard about it,  
and now we have seen it in the city of our God,  
the LORD All-Powerful.

This is the city that God will let stand forever.

<sup>9</sup> Our God,  
here in your temple we think about your love.

<sup>10</sup> You are famous and praised everywhere on earth,  
as you win victories with your powerful arm.

<sup>11</sup> Mount Zion will celebrate, and all Judah will be glad,  
because you bring justice.

<sup>12</sup> Let's walk around Zion and count its towers.

<sup>13</sup> We will see its strong walls and visit each fortress.

Then you can say to future generations,

<sup>14</sup> "Our God is like this forever and will always **[b]** guide us."

Inspired by Mark 6:1-13

And Jesus went back to Nazareth where he was from  
and his disciples came along with him.

And at the beginning of the Sabbath, he taught at the synagogue  
and many townspeople were impressed by what they heard, saying,  
“Where did he get all this?

And what sort of wisdom is this that he has received?

And what sort of deeds are being accomplished by his hands?

Isn't this that carpenter's son by Mary?

Isn't he the brother of Jacob, Joses, Judas, Simon, and their sisters?

Isn't he from here?”

And they were contemptuous of him.

So, Jesus said to them,

“No prophet is ever politically correct in one's own hometown  
or among relatives for that matter.

And he wasn't able to accomplish even one mighty deed  
except for the laying on of hands for a few sick people to cure them.

And Jesus was stunned by their faithlessness

So, he went on to teach in the surrounding villages.

Then, Jesus gathered the Twelve to him

and prepared to send them out, two by two,

and he gave them authority over perverse spirits.

And he instructed them not to take anything with them on the road  
besides a walking stick –

No knapsack, no bread, no coin-purse.

Just a pair of sandals and no extra garments.

And he said to them,

“Wherever you go – as you are invited into someone's home,  
stay there until it is time to go.

Yet as often as you are not welcomed and they won't listen to you,  
shake the pebbles out of your sandals, but declare to them,

‘I am telling you the truth, Sodom and Gomorrah

will have it easy compared to this city on Judgment Day!’ ”

And going forth,

they proclaimed that people should turn their lives around  
to be more loving;

And they cast out many evil spirits

and anointed many people who were afflicted and cured them.

Mark 6:1-13

<sup>1</sup>Jesus left and returned to his hometown<sup>[a]</sup> with his disciples.

<sup>2</sup>The next Sabbath he taught in the Jewish meeting place.

Many of the people who heard him were amazed and asked,

“How can he do all this?

Where did he get such wisdom

and the power to work these miracles?

<sup>3</sup>Isn't he the carpenter,<sup>[b]</sup>the son of Mary?

Aren't James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon his brothers?

Don't his sisters still live here in our town?”

The people were very unhappy because of what he was doing.

<sup>4</sup>But Jesus said,

“Prophets are honored by everyone,

except the people of their hometown

and their relatives and their own family.”

<sup>5</sup>Jesus could not work any miracles there,

except to heal a few sick people by placing his hands on them.

<sup>6</sup>He was surprised that the people did not have any faith.

Jesus taught in all the neighboring villages.

<sup>7</sup>Then he called together his twelve apostles

and sent them out two by two with power over evil spirits.

<sup>8</sup>He told them,

“You may take along a walking stick.

But don't carry food or a traveling bag or any money.

<sup>9</sup>It's all right to wear sandals,

but don't take along a change of clothes.

<sup>10</sup>When you are welcomed into a home,

stay there until you leave that town.

<sup>11</sup>If any place won't welcome you or listen to your message,

leave and shake the dust from your feet

as a warning to them.”

<sup>12</sup>The apostles left and started telling everyone to turn to God.

<sup>13</sup>They forced out many demons and

healed a lot of sick people by putting olive oil on them.