

**Matthew 10:1-14** <sup>1</sup> Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup> These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee and his brother John; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; therefore, give without payment. <sup>9</sup> Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff, for laborers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup> Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.

**Matthew 10:40-42** <sup>40</sup> “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous, <sup>42</sup> and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Matthew 10:1-14, 40-42

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“Sent Out”

Pastor Amy Terhune

You've probably all heard the old story about the town drunk who was down on his hands and knees one night underneath the streetlight searching and searching for something. The preacher happened to be walking by and asked him, "Sam, what in the world are you doing out here on your hands and knees?"

Sam looked up and said, "Oh, Hi Preacher, I'm hunting for my keys. I lost my keys."

The preacher, being a kind-hearted guy, got down on his hands and knees to help and said, "Show me where you dropped them and I'll help you find them."

Sam pointed off about 50 or 60 feet in the distance and said, "Oh, I lost them way over there in the grass."

Well, that just dumbfounded the preacher, so he asked, "Well, if you lost them way over there in the grass, why are you looking for them over here on the sidewalk?"

And Sam said, "Because this is where the light is." [from Billy D. Strayhorn, *How God Gets His Kicks*; illustrations on [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

That always makes me chuckle, even though I know it's an old joke. And I know it's an old joke based on my experience on the youth mission trip to Cabell County, West Virginia this week. We were working on a bathroom floor, and anytime we needed light to see under to crevices and crannies, we all reached for the same thing: our cell phone. Because they all have a built-in flashlight now.

When people are lost or scared, they go where the light is. Let's talk, just for a moment, about light. In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus says: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). And that makes sense. Of course Jesus is the light of the world. But earlier in Matthew's Gospel, in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, when Jesus is preaching on the side of mountain in what's come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount, he tells his disciples: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it

under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see the good in you and come to know God.” (Matthew 5:14-16). YOU are the light of the world. That’s a little more daunting, isn’t it? I don’t always feel equipped to carry the light of God in my very being. But that’s the call. And the purpose isn’t to shine for ourselves. It’s to shine for others – to be a haven of grace in a cruel world.

In this morning’s lesson, Jesus never actually mentions “light”. The word Jesus uses is “welcome”. But I think it’s the same concept. Like a candle in the window, or a neon sign on a dark highway, the disciples are sent out with a message of welcome. His sends his disciples out to their own people. They’re not yet being sent around the world, or across the sea. They’re sent to their own – their families, their neighbors, their communities. And they’re sent to their own with a message of welcome. That God is inviting them close; into deeper relationship.

They’re sent out to proclaim that Kingdom of God is near. They’re sent to cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with disease; and cast out demons. Let me tell you what that means in today’s language. To cure the sick is to be an agent of healing. And there’s all different kinds of healing that we may be about. To raise the dead is to be a channel of God’s resurrecting, life-giving power. And there’s a million ways to be life-giving in this world. To cleanse disease is to help people start over. It’s the gift of grace, of repentance, renewal, revival. Our world needs less judgement and more grace to thrive. And to cast out demons is to give hope, to open doors, to release from captivity. Hope is precious and too scarce these days. To proclaim the Kingdom of God is near, is to announce, not only with our voices, but with our giving, our voting, our work, and our action, that the world God intends for humankind – a just world, a peaceful world, an equitable world, a moral world, a kind and compassion world where all have opportunities to live into the fullness of the human experience – this world is possible and is worth sacrificing to build. It’s to partner with God in transforming and reshaping our world until it resembles heaven on earth. But we it starts with faith – a belief that a new world is possible. Too many people have grown resigned and cynical about the state of our world. And there are powers invested in making sure we stay that way. But God calls us to believe in God’s vision. With God, all things are possible, but in order to be part of the work, it’s really helpful if you trust that God can do what we can’t. Jesus sends his disciples out with a vision. And I have come to accept that while I may not see it with my eyes, I can already see it in my heart. And the faith that the impossible is possible is what carries me, just as it carried Jesus’ disciples. They’re sent out to welcome people to the vibrancy of God’s dream for humankind.

Perhaps you’ve heard the old story about the monastery that once pulsed and thrived with life. The monks had a vibrant prayer life, a wealth of services to the community, a depth of connection to God and one another. But as time passed, things began to grow stale. The brotherhood dwindled to a handful of monks, the monastery fell into disrepair, the ministries fell away because there were no longer enough monks to oversee them, and the few remaining elderly monks went through their days with heavy hearts remembering what once was.

One winter, a rabbi came to the woods near the monastery. He built a little cabin for rest and retreat, and would venture there from time to time for spiritual renewal. The old Abbott of the monastery felt that even though they came from different faith traditions, there might be a kinship between them because of their devotion to God. And so one day, when he heard the rabbi was at the cabin, he went to call on him. He found the rabbi ready and very willing to welcome the old Abbott into his tiny retreat. They sat before the fire sipping tea and sharing stories, and before long, the old Abbott found himself unburdening his soul to the rabbi as he had not done in many decades. The rabbi listened with compassion, and when he’d heard the Abbott’s grief, he bowed his head in prayer for a quite a while. Finally, he lifted his head and opened his eyes, and turned to the old Abbott.

“I have a word for you from the Lord,” said the Rabbi. “The Messiah is among you. This is what God has told me to share with you.”

The old Abbott was taken aback. The messiah is among us? There were only six old monks left. Who could it possibly be? Brother Tom, who’d grown cantankerous in his old age? Brother Maxwell, who couldn’t hear anything, and was constantly shouting at the table? Brother John, Brother Samuel, Brother

Silas, old men who spent more time reading than anything. It couldn't possibly be me, thought the old Abbott, and he was perplexed.

When he returned, the brothers asked about the visit to the rabbi, and the old Abbott relayed the message he'd been given: The Messiah is one of us. Needless to say, all the old monks were astounded. One of us? That's ridiculous! But you know, something happened to those old monks that night. They began to change. The Messiah was one of them, but they couldn't be sure who, so they began to treat one another differently. Their care for each other blossomed, as did their care for their surrounds. After all, the messiah was among them. And before long, the town took notice, the church took notice, and others began to come, looking to join their ranks, to live among those with whom the Messiah resided. The monastery flourished, ministry burgeoned into fruitfulness and service, souls were fed. For the Messiah was among them. [traditional story; original source unknown.]

Now you know and I know that the Messiah had resided among them all along. He never left. It was in remembering his presence that they rekindled their passion, remembered their identity, and rebirthed their vision and purpose.

If we move on in our lesson, we encounter Jesus words about not taking gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, nor a bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, and I feel a streak of guilt when I read that because every time the bishop sends me somewhere, I go with an 18-wheeler moving truck. But I can in all honesty say this much: if the parsonage burnt down tomorrow, and everything I owned was lost, I'd be okay. I honestly think the things I'd grieve most are the pictures and the a few family heirlooms that remind me of my parents and grandparents. The stuff makes me comfortable, makes life easier, but it's not what defines me. And it's not where I ground my trust. My future, my life, my family, the things that matter – those are given to God for safe keeping. Imperfectly and sometimes begrudgingly, I trust God. And that's what Jesus is really talking about.

Which is good, because Jesus tells us directly that we will sometimes fail. We will go out with a welcome to God's presence, but not everyone will embrace it. Some will resist it, resent it, do everything they can to disrupt it. And once we've given our all, and spoken our truth, and it doesn't land, which sometimes happens, Jesus instructs us not to get mired in a theological debate or be consumed with hate or despair, but to make our peace with it and go on with the work to which God has called us. Taylor Swift, who is an enormously popular singer with my daughter's generation, has a catchy song that remains one of my favorites. She sings about all the different things that people say about her: that she's an airhead, a flirt, a spoiled rich girl, and so forth. To which she sings:

*But I keep cruisin', can't stop, won't stop groovin'  
It's like I got this music in my mind sayin', "It's gonna be alright"  
'Cause the players gonna play, play, play...  
And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate...  
But I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake it off, shake it off.  
[by Taylor Swift on album "1989"]*

Which is Biblical, really, because that's what Jesus tells us to do. Shake it off, like dust from your feet. Shake it off and go on. Don't let anyone else keep you from being the light of Christ in the world. You don't get anywhere without risk, and risks are risky – they don't always work. But God calls us to take chances, to embrace the leap of faith, to give of our best selves knowing full well that it doesn't always succeed. A wiser counselor once told me we're not called to success but to faithfulness. That's good advice. If we're going to live a welcome in a fearful suspicious world, we're occasionally going to meet with closed doors. Trust. Serve. Be light. And when we fail, shake it off and keep shining, keeping living the welcome, because someone out there needs it.

Which brings us to Jesus' final words in this lesson. Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. The monks at that old monastery learned this. It's the ministry of hospitality – the ministry of welcoming. It's something of a paradox that Jesus sends his disciples out to live a ministry of hospitality. To us, we think of hospitality as welcoming in. And certainly, the church needs to do that. Our building should be a place where all people are welcome. It

should be a place where there are no second-class citizens. But I've heard enough horror stories in my time to know that doesn't always happen. I've heard about black families being told they're in the wrong place and sent to the "black" church down the street. I've heard about parents being told not to bring their disruptive child back to Sunday School. I've heard about pregnant teenage girls being told they were no longer welcome at youth group. I've seen gay couples turned away from their own church when they come to be married. I've heard about homeless persons being chased from church buildings because they make the rest of the congregation uncomfortable. It happens. And it breaks my heart every time. Because it's often true that the ones hardest to love are the ones who need it the most. And too often we let our fear speak louder in our souls than our faith. And too many of us are quicker to judge others than to question our own gut responses. I stand convicted of sometimes failing to live Christ's welcome as unconditionally as I should.

But Jesus sends his disciples out. They're sent out into their community, into the streets and centers and marketplaces, and that's where they're told to proclaim the vision and be the light and live the welcome. Out there. Our faith really is meaningless if it doesn't hit the ground running with us on Monday morning out there.

Hospitality out there is being a beacon of welcome; a safe place. It is a basic tenet of our faith, an act of being like Jesus, a way of living and being in the world. Hospitality is a way of experiencing the presence of Jesus.

There was a church, not all that different from this one, who opened its doors once a week to boys of the neighborhood so they could play basketball in their building. They were in a rough neighborhood, and many of the boys who came were among the roughest troublemakers out there. This particular church did not have a separate gym and sanctuary. It had a worship center which was also their fellowship hall and gymnasium. One evening, as the boys were playing ball, they got a little wild and out of hand, as boys will do, and they broke the large, very expensive, very old stained glass window that the folks of the church had saved when their old building burned and installed at the front of the worship center. Now these boys were troubled, but they weren't stupid, and most of them believed they had probably just worn out their welcome with the church folks.

Some of the boys immediately tried to flee the scene, and yes, some of the church folks were mad indeed. One of the supervisors on duty that night happened to be the chair of the Trustees. He was a big, intimidating kind of fellow, and his voice carried to every corner of that room. He immediately shut the doors to keep any of the boys from leaving, and set them all down on the floor to give them a talking to. Here, in a nutshell, is what he said:

"You boys have just broken a very valuable stained glass window. It's old and it's unique—there aren't other stained glass windows like this out in the world. It was designed for us. But the window is not what concerns me. There are some other things in this room that are of enormous value and are entirely unique, and they're broken, too. I'm referring to you boys, and to us adults, too. We're broken. But God loves us so much, he sent his boy to die for us. That's how valuable we are. There is no one else in the world like you. You are special. God designed you, and God has plans for each and every one of us. You may not think so, but he does. So if you ever get to feeling like this window—broken, shattered, hurting—you remember that. You boys know that I'm here every week. Basketball will continue. I'll be here next week and the week after that and the week after that, and while you boys play ball, I'm going to be hanging around out in the narthex or in the office. It's important that you boys understand something: this window can be fixed. And so can we. If you ever need to talk about how God fixes us or what God has in store for your life, you come find me. Because I'll be here."

Here is a church that understood hospitality—that it's about people, that it's basic to faith, that it's being Christ-like. Who would ever have thought that a broken window could become a metaphor for broken lives? It didn't happen overnight. But slowly, over months, one boy and then two and then a handful searched out this man who promised to be there for them. And more than one of them experienced coming into the light, a cup of cold water on a parched throat, and indeed, the very presence of Christ. And that is what we're called to be. May it be so. Amen.