

**June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

## **Matthew 10:40-42 “Reclaiming Partnerships”**

We’re on week 8 of our “re-claiming the teachings of Jesus” series. Some of these teachings aren’t very easy are they? The one Georgeanne dealt with last week was a doozy, that’s for sure! It’s no wonder that some churches are sort of falling off the wagon when it comes to living out the teachings of Jesus. A lot of these teachings seem pretty simple on paper, but when you consider the “internal work” required to live out these teachings, you realize that it takes a lot of time, effort, and energy. Let’s face it, it’s not easy being a disciple. In fact, it’s downright overwhelming sometimes. Yeah, but doesn’t it say somewhere in the Bible that God will never give us more than we can handle? No, in fact, it doesn’t. Oh yeah? I’m pretty sure over in the middle of “One Corinthians” it says, “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” Yes, and that’s *First Corinthians*, chapter 10:13. And that’s a sermon for another day. But it does not say that God won’t give you more than you can handle though. But we say that when we run across someone who’s had one hardship after another stacked up in their lives. What we want to say is, “Listen, you’re strong. You’re tough. You can do this. You are up to the challenge. You will get through this.” And that’s fine. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be encouraging and giving someone hope during tough times. It’s natural to want to tell someone, “This will not defeat you. God is in control and loves you. Hang in there.” But again, nowhere does it say, “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” The other problem I have with *this* non-biblical platitude is that it makes it sound like God is sitting at some cosmic chess board moving people around so that it seems some people receive random rewards while others receive random penalties. No rhyme, no reason … we’re just pawns in a cosmic game of chess or worse … we’re lab rats running through a maze just to see how we react to stress. This is not how God works. The Book of Job teaches us that we live in a cause and effect world where sometimes stuff just happens for no reason at all. What we

can take comfort in is that we live in a world where no matter what happens, God is there to walk with us.

So rather than saying, “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle,” why can’t we just acknowledge that we feel overwhelmed sometimes? I’d love to say, “No one will judge you for saying you’re overwhelmed,” but we know that’s not true. People judge. It’s human nature. But let’s just agree to own this truth today - We get overwhelmed. Can we agree to that? Let’s own it. And let’s admit that sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the very things that Jesus calls us to do. As I said earlier – Looks easy on paper, but not so easy when we consider the sheer volume of work that is required to prepare the world for the coming of God’s reign. It was only two weeks ago that we heard Jesus tell his disciple, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” Jesus is acknowledging that the need is overwhelming, and there aren’t enough faithful people to do the work. “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.” Where are we going to find these laborers though? Especially if the need is so overwhelming that we’re not sure whether we’re even up for the task.

Here’s something I learned a couple of weeks ago that blew my mind. While we’ve been busy trying to figure out how to get through the Corona Virus, there are 3,000 Camp Fire survivors who are still in need of case managers to help them find basic survival-level needs. Three ... thousand. Three thousand people still living in trailers, tents or other temporary shelters who are just waiting for someone to help them navigate the paperwork to get help. Anyone for telling these folks, “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle?” Or maybe my second favorite non-biblical platitude, “God helps those who help themselves, so why do you still need help?” This is one of those cases where the harvest is plentiful, but again, the laborers are few.

So ... let’s turn our attention to the scripture Joe read for a bit and see how this all fits together. Remember, we’ve been in Matthew’s gospel since the first week of June. We actually started with the last chapter of

Matthew where he commissioned the disciples to carry on his ministry without his physical presence. He told them to go into all the world to teach, preach and baptize knowing that he'd always be present in Spirit until the ends of the earth. Then on the 14<sup>th</sup>, we jumped all the way back to chapters 9 and 10 where Jesus gave the newly called disciples their first instructions to go out on their own. He told them to go proclaim the good news that "The Kingdom of Heaven has come near." He gave them the gift of his authority as the Son of God to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. Then he told them not to get tied down to material possessions. If people received their message, great. If they don't, just shake it off and move on. Then he said, "And don't think this is going to be easy either. You're going to face some major pushback from the powers that be. My message will cause major turmoil, even among families. Don't think that my message is going to bring peace and harmony. It's going to cause people to pick up swords." Again, this is not easy work.

In this week's passage, I believe that Jesus was trying to get his disciples to understand that there are others out in this field, where the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few, who are doing the same kind of work as the disciples but who *aren't* disciples. Sure, if someone welcomes you, it's as if they are welcoming me. I don't have to be there, but because you are doing my work, all they have to do is welcome you, and they're good. If they welcome you as a prophet, that's fine too. They'll receive a prophet's reward. Same applies to a righteous person. And here's the one that's going to be hard for you all because I know how much it means for you to be recognized for the work that you do for me: If a person who may not even be a disciple gives a thirsty child a cup of water in the name of a disciple, they will not miss out on their reward.

Let's go back to this thing that we agreed to own this morning – We get overwhelmed. But here's the good news. We are not called to be out in the field working the harvest alone. There are others out there doing "Jesus work" too, but they aren't working for Jesus in the same way as Jesus' disciples do. Remember those 3,000 people from the Burn Zone

who are waiting for help a year and a half after the fire? What would you say to me if I told you, “Hey, I just volunteered First Christian Church to be in charge of finding spiritual and emotional care for these folks?” You’d probably say, “Have fun with that one Jesse!” But what would you say if I said, “I offered to be a part of a team made up of Unitarians, Baptists, Universalists, Jews, Episcopalians, Lutherans and Ba’hai whose goal is to provide spiritual and emotional support to people who have been through the fire? That changes things around a bit. The problem is, some Christians might object to working with churches who don’t have Jesus as the center of their faith and practice. There are even Christians who would have a problem working with other Christian churches who don’t baptize their members by immersion, or subscribe to a particular religious creed. There are some churches whose entire goal in everything they say and do is to convert “the lost” to their particular congregation. How can you hope to accomplish that when you’re working with “the competition?” Meanwhile, you’ve got people who are literally starving for help, but no one wants to cooperate or work together to address the need.

This is where I think it’s important for us to reclaim the idea of partnerships, especially with those who are seeking to help others in need. Our church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a great track record with establishing partnerships with other people who are doing the work of a disciple even if they aren’t a “Disciple of Christ.” Our founder, Alexander Campbell said, “We are not the only Christians, we are Christians only.” He also said, “Unity is our Polar star.” Even with that, it took a few decades before we were able to live into those values, but pretty soon we partnered with other churches in Global Mission. Even to this day, we work closely with other Christian denominations across the globe to help people in need in Africa, East Asia, the Pacific Islands, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Europe, and Southern Asia. It’s been awhile since I’ve seen the numbers, but when I went to the Disciples Global Ministries website this week, it says we work with over 190 mission partners. Listen to the names of just a few of these – The Council of Evangelical Churches for

Denominational Alliance. Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela. The Moravian Church of Nicaragua. Uniting Churches in Australia. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. Some of these global ministry partners aren't even linked to a church like the Asian Human Rights Commission and the Disabled Persons Service Center in Taiwan. That's just 8 out of 190!

Okay, but what about locally? Here in Chico, First Christian Church partners with the Jesus Center, the Chico Area Interfaith Council, the Catholic Ladies Relief Society, Stonewall Alliance of Chico, the Peg Taylor Center, the Sixth Street Center for Youth, Chico Housing Action Team, and Safe Space Winter Shelter. Remember when I asked, "What would you think if I offered our church to be a part of a team made up of Unitarians, Baptists, Universalists, Jews, Episcopalians, Lutheran and Ba'hai whose goal is to provide spiritual and emotional support to people who have been through the fire?" I did. And it's called "Resilience Resources." And we've been working together for a year now. We are still doing the work of a disciple of Christ. We're just not doing it alone. But you know what? Even with partners, it can still seem overwhelming. But we do our work with the authority Jesus gives us, and with the aid and support of the Holy Spirit who inspires us. It's still true, and will continue to be true - The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. But it's a whole lot less overwhelming when we are willing to work as partners with the ones who are out working the fields.