

*Lord, make these words to be your Word, that our hearts might become your Heart.*

What is your reaction to the word “evangelism?” [I’m going to open up a poll – just give a quick answer: Scary? Exciting? Distasteful? Other?]

We have layered that word with so many icky associations, who wants it?

But what if I told you that’s our number 1 job as Christ followers?

not lovely worship, not pastoral care, not bible study, not feeding people –

Telling our God stories so more people might find their way into this community we call church and claim to love.

All those other things either equip us to invite others, or flow out of that.

But no one but you can tell your stories and create a community where someone else can tell theirs.

When did that get so complicated?

When we separated it from nurturing a real relationship with Jesus.

When we started to think you had to go to seminary to do that.

When we worried we needed to know the right words.

But no one but you can tell your stories! And that’s all evangelism is.

What is Jesus’ first instruction when he sends his disciples out?

*Take nothing with you!* Jesus is very specific about that command:

*Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics – no change of clothes, folks – or sandals, or a staff.*

Everything you need will be provided when you get there, even the words to say and the power to heal.

They were to go out into the countryside, among their own people, to find folks who were “harassed and the helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

And when they found them, if they were welcomed, they were to accept hospitality and proclaim among those people the good news that the Kingdom of God had come near; and they were to heal the sick and cast out demons.

They were to take nothing that might make them self-sufficient – they had to go out among these harassed and helpless people and rely on their hospitality.

That runs so counter to how we tend to operate as Westerners, as Americans.

We like to be self-sufficient – it makes us secure to know we can take care of ourselves, have provided for our own futures, don’t need anything from anyone.

I can't tell you how often I hear people say, "Well, I don't want to burden anyone," as though asking for help, or letting someone else know when you're sick or depressed or having a hard time is a burden.

We don't want to admit to being harassed and helpless – God helps those who help themselves, right? Wrong! Whoever came up with that little gem ought to be put away, because you certainly won't find it anywhere in the Bible.

Jesus sent out his disciples, making them depend "on the kindness of strangers." I'm sure they were like us – we like to be generous, and control it, wanting to give when and how much we decide we want to give.

We don't like to go to friends' houses empty-handed, let alone on mission trips. And so we tend to approach people in need as though that's all they were – people with needs, not people with assets and gifts to offer.

When we do the Plentiful Table at Wayside, or Food Pantry at La Plata, we give, they receive. What if we invited people to sit and talk, find out what their talents and strengths are, what they have to offer us? Our ministries have to be mutual in order to build community.

As you know, I helped build a school in Kenya for children made vulnerable by AIDS. If we just went over there and said, "We know what you need to do," we'd miss out on all that they have to offer us.

We know how to raise money; we know how to structure organizations to be effective. But they know so much more about building community, about how to educate their children.

Jesus sent out his disciples, telling them to take nothing.

He gave them one thing to take, and he's given it to us as well: his authority.

Authority to proclaim good news that the Kingdom of God had come near, which was their way of saying that God had not abandoned his people,

Imagine how that sounded to a people subjugated by the brutal Roman Empire?

That God's love was so strong, God had made a way to bring them close again?

Imagine how that might sound to a person isolated by Covid, not sure when she will work again? Imagine how that might sound to a young black man who must fear for his life every time he takes a walk or gets into his car?

Jesus gave his disciples authority to proclaim the good news of freedom from the grind of sin and self-sufficiency.

We get to tell people, "Hey, it's not all up to you! You're off the hook.

Let me help. Let God help – there's the power you need."

Jesus is still calling disciples to himself, and sending us out with his authority. The power that made the universe has now been entrusted to us, my friends. God does not expect us to do anything but complete the work He has begun.

I know when I'm faced with a person who has huge challenges and complex problems, I usually try to problem-solve. I try to think of solutions; I try to get them to feel their feelings. I can pray. I'm pretty good – I'm insightful, I'm energetic, I'm creative. But I'm at my best the times I remember, "Oh yeah. I got nothing. But God has everything this person needs." And when I remember that, and kind of sit back and let Jesus take control of the situation, it's amazing how much power comes in to me and the other person.

Jesus never asks anything of his followers that he didn't do himself, including "going with nothing." Jesus, the Son of God, "through whom all things were made," gave up all that power and glory in the heavens to come and sojourn with his people for a time, in order that we might be led back to God. He truly came with nothing but his identity; being born in the most vulnerable and contingent of circumstances, to a couple far from home, in a backwater of the Roman empire. And when he took up his adult ministry, he went out with nothing – entirely dependent upon hospitality of others, often very "inappropriate" people. He had no home, no salary, no 401(k), no health insurance, no bank card. And in his final giving up of himself, he relinquished even his life's breath, going into the unknown darkness of death and hell in order to conquer even those realms for us, to set us free for eternal life.

He came into this world with nothing. But what he had he has given us:  
The guidance of His Holy Spirit as to where to go next;  
The power of His Holy Spirit to heal every disease and sickness, even death;  
The authority of His Father in heaven over evil, whether personal, in the case of people oppressed by demons, or systemic, in corrupt and despotic leaders.

Making ourselves vulnerable has its cost; giving stuff away can leave us poorer; standing with people who are oppressed and harassed can get us tear-gassed. But what does Paul say? We know that *suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

What a promise! God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit.  
We stand in that flood every time we gather for worship, every time we pray,  
every time we use the gifts God has given us to make Jesus known,  
every time we go out of our way to love someone, every time we exult in God.

Christ came into this world with nothing but love,  
love that proved to be the most powerful force this world has ever known.  
When we go forth in Christ's name, carrying nothing with us –  
not even our expertise, our opinions, our wealth;  
taking only the love with which God has blessed us,  
we will find ourselves agents of transforming connections,  
messengers of healing love who are loved in return.

Go with nothing.

Go with God – who is everything.

With whom will you share your stories with this week? *Amen.*

### Matthew 9:35-10:8

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues, and **proclaiming the good news** of the kingdom, and **curing every disease and every sickness**. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were **harassed and helpless**, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

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**. 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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus **sent out** with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, **proclaim the good news**, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' **Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons**. You received without payment; give without payment.

[Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 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. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."]

### Romans 5:1-8

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. **And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.