

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen.

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

In our current sermon series, 'FAITH &...' we have partnered the scheduled psalm with the gospel lesson to uncover the call to faith in all circumstances and situations. We have heard that the smallest amount of faith in God can be very powerful. We have heard the expectation that faith grows within us as we trust in God's presence and promises. Our FAITH &... series concludes today with the 'last, but not least' component... FAITH & MISSION!

MISSION has many meanings, as do most words in the English language. The meaning of a word depends on how it is used... as a noun or a verb.

Mission is understood to be "a specific task with which a person or a group is charged"¹. Sometimes, mission refers to a place established for a purpose...for example, The Baltimore Washington Conference Mission Center... the physical place from which persons are sent for a prescribed purpose/mission. Can you name another mission location? (Mission Control, Embassy) Did anyone say the church...Saint James?

Yes, Saint James is a place of mission. Saint James has a statement of our vision of the mission...that is frequently summarized as 'LOVING AND SERVING GOD and GOD'S PEOPLE.

The UMC has a vision of its mission: transformed lives transform lives as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

¹ "Mission." Merriam-Webster.com Thesaurus, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/mission>. Accessed 3 Jul. 2021.

On this auspicious day, the 4th of July, on which we remember the service and sacrifice given to establish a union of people free from unjust tyranny and oppression, it is appropriate for this Body of Christ – Saint James- to reflect upon our calling... our mission as followers of Christ.

PS 48: The psalm offers a vision of God's Mission Center, a place of welcome and safety. But Not just a physical place, the City of God is a community whose life mission is to embody how God wants people to live together; to model blessing. Abraham & Sarah got the ball rolling in following God. Moses, Miriam & Aaron lead the people to a promised land. David serves as leader to unify the people. Now Jesus has taken up the mission to lead and equip others to embark & embody the mission anew... through the multiplication factor.

Mark 6: 1-13: Mark's Gospel is structured in a way that the readers are following a progressive journey to the cross where Jesus can be fully recognized as God's Child. Until then, people consistently misunderstand who he is and what his ministry is all about. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus' own hometown rejects him. But Jesus simply PIVOTS, ADAPTS and continues in his ministry and sends his disciples on to other towns to bless those whom they encounter.

What does this mean for us as faithful followers and as a faith community?

This story reminds us that there is a cost to discipleship... to loving and serving God and God's people. Jesus' rejection by his own hometown is a helpful note to keep in mind. The mission of God is a threat to the status quo. Jesus' mission was very clear: God's Spirit was upon him; he was anointed and sent to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captive, recover sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6; Luke 4:18-19). In his mission statement Jesus intends to establish a new sense of human family and a new sense of human community.

To accomplish his mission, Jesus must develop and equip those willing to follow, willing to receive teaching, willing to assume the authority given and use it to love and serve God's people in his name.

Further, Jesus set forth guidelines for the mission and how to deal with rejection. Commentator Jim McDonald suggests three simple rules for the road²:

- 1) TRAVEL LIGHT. Trust that God will provide what is needed. Avoid the temptation to possess, consume or hold on to the past.
- 2) TRAVEL TOGETHER. As we respond to God's call to this mission, invite others to come along. There is accountability, safety & companionship.
- 3) TRAVEL IN PEACE. Be a non-anxious presence, knowing it takes many drops in a bucket to fill it up. No one person is going to solve hunger, poverty, end racism or domestic violence. Each of us has a contribution to share in blessing others with love, compassion, and healing.

Let me share with you a bit about the Mission and Ministry activities this church has done in this last year.

- 1) Established opportunities for connections when we had to stop gathering together via phone calls, conference calls, & outdoor parking lot conversations as well as initiated online worship.
- 2) Engaged in the local Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) to be informed and responsive to needs in the community.
 - a. Continued Food Collections for the local Food Bank
 - b. Responded to needs for weekend food bags with a partner church
 - c. In October we Provided 32 winter coats for the local Coat Drive
 - d. Indicated our interest in serving as a local vaccination site
 - e. Last Weekend we served as one of 6 faith communities to giveaway clothing to needy families.

Let me tell you about this last activity:

- 3 people went to a warehouse to select the clothing – 14 boxes; 2hrs

² Jim McDonald, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time in Hunger for the Word, ed. Larry Hollar. 2005, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, MN. 137-139.

- 4 people in three vehicles went to pick up the pallet of boxes and helped unload the truck 1hr
- A Team of servants sorted and organized the clothing 2 hrs
- A team of servants were present to assist families 2 ½ hr
- Our site served at least 10 families; the event served over 250 families
- Families that came to SJ included schools in the areas of St John's Lane, Centennial Lane, and several schools in Columbia (Harper's Choice, Swansfield, etc)

What was learned: there is great need in Howard County; we made new connections with faith communities; companions makes the mission easier; trust God to reveal a way when you don't have all the answers or all the details; even if you don't know all the details, do it anyway.

In this psalm we have a vision of God's realm and God's desire for blessing all humanity.

In this gospel lesson, we can see ourselves sent out as disciples to proclaim and live a life bringing love, justice, peace, healing and blessing. Truly, we are sent out in Jesus' name. We are called to love and serve God and God's people, united to overcome the worldly obstructions of ethnicity, class, race, and gender that tear at the fabric of community.

We, the community of faith, must be people of welcome with warm hearts and open hands; ready to love and serve our diverse human family, ready to value the gifts for mission and ministry each person brings to the community.

Let us remember... As we work to address needs in the community, God stands with us. As we work to address evil & injustice, God is with us. As we work to value all persons for their talents and gifts, God is with us. As we work to be united in living out our faith with love, justice, peace, healing and mission, God is with us. We are not alone. Every true call to Christian mission comes with authority as we go in the name, spirit, and power of God. **May it be so! So be it. Amen.**