

## Sacred Heart Spirituality Forum 2017

Homily delivered July 13<sup>th</sup> by Kristi Laughlin, Sacred Heart Associate

GN 44:18-21, 23B-29; 45:1-5

MT 10:7-15

### Time for a Re-Commissioning

The Scripture readings today are certainly dramatic. It is what my seven-year old son would probably call “EPIC!” The first reading is the culminating moment of the Joseph saga where Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers and offers his unqualified forgiveness for their betrayal years ago selling him into slavery in Egypt. Moreover, Joseph testifies to God’s saving grace in their actions, and finds blessing in the events that unfolded in his life. Then, in the Gospel reading we have the grand commissioning of the Disciples where Jesus instructs them to go forth and “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and drive out demons!”

Each reading is about taking bold, courageous, transformative action—all born out of a tremendous and unfailing trust in God. Wow. That kind of trust is what truly feels elusive to me...Especially in these times of grave anxiety, tumult, and violence.

So this is what draws me to the Gospel reading. The need for a commissioning—to feel and trust the power of Jesus’ authority so completely, that I too can embody gospel zeal and take bold, transformative action, the kind this world desperately needs.

The Gospel reading also captures the moment we are living in the life of the Society. Isn’t the process of the General Chapter, the Assembly and this Forum, a process of Re-commissioning? Of drawing closer to Jesus, and to our founding mothers, and fellow sacred Heart disciples, so that we can “hear again” instructions of how to be apostles in this time, in this place.

So, it is worth pondering Jesus’ instructions in this commissioning. Each instruction is clear, simple, and... extremely loaded!

**1. First, Jesus instructs his disciples to Proclaim!** *“As you go forth, make the proclamation the **kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”* Frankly, I have been wrestling with this command. Perhaps, it challenges my Catholic sensibility, sounding a little evangelical. But it

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also makes me confront my own skepticism. The kingdom of heaven certainly *does not* seem near at hand in these tumultuous times. In fact, if I am honest, I feel as if I have been more inclined to make proclamations about the apocalypse in this past year! I wonder if my own justice work isn't motivated by a sense of crisis more often than rooted in a joyful proclamation of hope. Yet, when we look at the prophets, their role was two-fold: not just "to Decry" injustice and exploitation, but "to Proclaim" a new way forward, a vision of shalom.

Reading this Scripture made me think of the example and lesson in the Fast Food workers campaign and their cry for \$15.00 an hour. When the first 200 workers in New York City began with their one-day strike and demand back in 2012, people laughed and scoffed—even advocates. It was not realistic or winnable. Mind you, that \$15.00 an hour is more than *double* what the Federal minimum wage currently is. And yet, five years later, the minimum wage has been increased in dozens of cities and states around the country, making \$15.00 an hour go from "pie in the sky," to a new baseline standard in many regions.

This is the power of proclamation. *For we can't achieve what we don't dare imagine.* I wonder what it would look like to do more proclaiming in my own work? And in our collective Sacred Heart ministry?

**2. Jesus's next command is: *Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons!*** The message immediately after "Proclaim!" is to **act boldly!** I think we all get that, and live that, here in this room. We are after all, wholly contemplative and *wholly apostolic*. We are doers. Teachers. Founders of schools and spiritual ministry centers. But this line is also about the WHO. Who is the recipient of Jesus' actions?

St. Matthew tells us that Jesus sent his apostles out to the lost sheep. As many Commentaries reveal, the lost sheep were out of the urban centers, those on the land, with more precarious and/or more disreputable living. They were those outside the circles of social and even religious acceptability. When Jesus commands his disciples to go to "the sick, the lepers, the "possessed," he is sending them to the most demeaned and

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marginalized. Lepers were the feared and the loathed. The banished: forced to live outside their homes and communities.

Disturbingly, this issue of banishment is all too contemporary, as our leaders literally seek to ban Muslims from travel here, and talk about deporting millions of immigrants. While many of us may reject such broad, generalized scapegoating, what are the other barriers and social stigmas we perpetuate, and that go unexamined because they are socially acceptable or religiously sanctioned? Certainly the younger generation has called into question the gender binary—that of being forced to fit into the male or female category, which excludes and denies gender non-conforming people.

I am also thinking of those categories in my own work for immigrant rights. How we have been quick to create categories of “good and worthy” immigrants that merit our advocacy, like the “Dreamers,” the young people brought here as children by their parents. Yet, there has been silence around those “others,” the *“immigrants with criminal convictions”* that the Administration is zealously targeting. Even those who have already served their time and have lives and families here. But they elicit fear and bear the mark of social disapproval. Might they be the lepers of whom Jesus speaks today?

Jesus was undoubtedly challenging very real social and religious norms in his time. He was commanding that his Disciples go against the grain and to reach out across fears, barriers, stigmas, and essentially dissolve the divide! In essence, he was tasking the Disciples with doing the impossible! And that is certainly how we might hear his command to, “Raise the Dead.” But is it not a *command to bring life, to bring wholeness to ALL?*

**3. But to do this, we must heed a third command of Jesus: To Trust Completely.** Jesus instructs his disciples, *“Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick.”* Perhaps a more modern rendering might be “Do not take your cell phone!”

This command is a tough and exacting one: Bring no extra provisions with you. Your security is in me...This is super counter-cultural for us North Americans, invested both in our things and the notion of self-sufficiency. I am not sure we know how to rely on God. As

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Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian survivor of a concentration camp writes, *“You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have.”*

So, Jesus is challenging us literally and spiritually to do just that. Make yourself vulnerable. Leave your attachments behind. Discard your other (false) security blankets. TRUST. And as we have discussed here, isn't this command embodied in image from the General Chapter of boarding the Rebecca and needing to leave behind what once was essential, but no longer serves? So, what is it that we need the courage to leave behind in our personal lives? And as a Sacred Heart family?

Notably, Jesus understands that trusting him means relying on others.

**4. A fourth command is to receive hospitality.** Jesus says, *“Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave.”* Note that Jesus does not say go pitch your own tent somewhere in the town you visit, camp out on your own or be self-sufficient. Because this command to depend on and receive hospitality is so essential for formation and enacting the kingdom of heaven. Remember, that Jesus is sending his disciples among the poor and outcast, the stigmatized, “the lost sheep.” Yet, he affirms that there are worthy people there and he instructs his disciples to stay with them. Rely on them. Receive what they have to offer. Enter into their reality.

Certainly, in Biblical times hospitality was a cultural norm, as there was no Air B&B. But it went way beyond our modern practice of “having your friends over for a dinner party.” In the Hebrew Bible, it was a religious mandate for the Jewish people to “welcome the stranger” –meaning the alien and the immigrant into your home. And the Greek in the New Testament also suggests “loving them like your siblings.”

So, this command to *offer* hospitality is pretty radical...Just as it can be to receive it. As so many of you know so well, those who have been on the receiving end in other countries. I still hold onto an experience I had in Mexico during my time staying with the RSCJ community there. I was doing surveys with women and I went to interview among the most destitute family in the area. They lived in a shack, or really, more of a lean-to, with a dirt floor, and no steady source of income. Yet, the couple sent their child out on an errand while I was there to purchase a 2-liter bottle of Coca Cola so that they could offer me

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something in their home. That was such a disconcerting experience for me, so disturbed was I at their outlay of scarce resources.

Yet, it was also a learning moment. I was changed by that experience and their ethic of generosity. I confronted my own personal/cultural/spiritual constraints of giving only out of a sense of surplus. I realized how much I am governed by a scarcity model rather than the abundance one, which is God's paradigm. Yes, that family invested in that Coke for me; but they also did it because that's who they are. It was about their own dignity and their faith witness of hospitality.

Hospitality is an imperative for Jesus's disciples. For it builds bridges. It allows for encounter. It fosters humbling dependence, which necessarily reminds us of our collective inter-dependence. Hospitality is a foundational spiritual practice that both forms us, and simultaneously enacts a piece of the reign of God.

What a hopeful sign are all the houses of welcome/hospitality the Society is opening.

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The Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart § 15 says:

*"Contemplating Jesus, we learn from his attitudes and responses how, in all our relationships, to witness to the liberating power of his love"*

So, let us continue to contemplate Jesus's instructions to his Disciples in the days and months ahead so that we really can give bold witness to the lost sheep in these times:

1. Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
2. Go to the margins and take on the impossible
3. Trust completely in God
4. Receive (and offer) hospitality

Each of these is a command to break down the psychological, social and spiritual barriers that divide us from one another, from God, and to bring us into right relationship and the wholeness that God seeks for all of us. And perhaps the beauty of our time is that there is an awakening taking place. Our blind spots are being exposed, and systems of oppression

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unmasked. And, we now realize more than ever that it is up to *each and every one of us* to be the agents of change that unlock the “code” to the kingdom.

I saw the incredible power of that awakening the weekend that Trump signed the Executive Order for the travel ban. Within, hours of his decree, people around the country flocked to the airports to proclaim, “No Ban, No Wall: Sanctuary For All!” My husband, son and I responded to the FACEBOOK post to show up at the San Francisco International Terminal on the second day of the protest.

When I arrived, I was floored to see thousands crowding in around the Arrival Gates and the most diverse crowd that I have ever experienced in my whole life: the lifelong activists and anarchists, mingling with the techies from Silicon Valley who had never protested in their lives; college students and Black Lives Matter activists; Catholic nuns and Buddhist monks; Grandmothers who had taken the Bart train in from the suburbs; the principal from my son’s school; lawyers from the ACLU and dozens of private pro-bono attorneys. There was a kids space carved out, where random adults were stepping up to engage the children in drawing pictures and making signs. An elaborate welcome table was erected, with greeters distributing water bottles and snack bars. And it all turned into a roaming dance party as we all grooved to the marching band that showed up, the Brass Liberation Orchestra. But my most moving moment was when we were leaving the airport after six hours. A group of what appeared to be a Muslim boy-scout troupe, rushed into the elevator. They were carrying eight boxes of Domino’s Pizza. The leader anxiously asked, “Is it over? We heard about the protest on the radio, so we thought we would bring food for the people showing solidarity.”

For me, that was my “epic” moment. It was a small taste of the reign of God. I saw the unity that is possible when we all listen to God and the Sacred Heart calling us, and take seriously our own role as apostles!

May we all feel our own commission as apostles in a new way in the days and months ahead!

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