

“Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come into God’s presence with thanksgiving.”  
AMEN!

Wow!

Talk about a perfect psalm to begin with song,  
but (sadly) the Lord did not bring a song  
to mind during the preparation of this homily.

What can I say?

Sometimes one comes and sometimes, it doesn’t!

What is here, though, are some  
really good points for us to know or  
learn from Jesus.

If we are willing to listen.

And that brings to mind the importance of  
this season we call “Time after Pentecost.”

For the next few months, or so, we will  
dive deep into the teachings of Jesus,  
from Matthew’s context,  
and follow his story of healings,

teachings and encounters with people in society.

And Matthew will bring some zingers!

Teachings and examples from Jesus  
where I will be tempted as your pastor  
to soften his words or actions.

But, we must not do that.

Since Jesus spoke about the mission of His followers,  
and his follower's participated in the mission,  
and during that time there were teachings

and actions that brought division,  
we must bear the full message.

In other words, we must let  
the heavy lifting of the text  
speak to us.

And we best not soften the prophecies  
because there was a "cost" to following Jesus.

Back then, the cost was execution.

Tradition holds that each of the apostles  
were ultimately killed for following Jesus' call  
to proclaim God's love and inclusion

“to the ends of the earth.”

In our day, in our society, it is not likely  
that we will be killed for following Jesus.

Not likely, but still it is possible because  
the interpretation of a compassionate  
Christ *and* a Christ who will come to judge  
the living and the dead is one that  
will step on toes and  
disrupt comfortable notions of  
privilege.

It is not likely that we will be killed but  
it is very likely we will be laughed at, or shamed,  
to follow and proclaim this God who  
cares about the displaced and hurting.

(Pause)

Not only cares, but necessitates followers  
to do something positive to help.

So, now we are ready to get a toe (or two)  
stepped on, or experience a pinch (or two) in  
our side because the truth is...  
sometimes we just don't like  
what Jesus had to say.

You see, the “harvest” that Jesus talked about,

in this instance, was not the kind of harvest  
that Matthew and others spoke  
about pertaining to the end of time.

As in the “chaff will be separated  
from the wheat.”

Those are about who Jesus casts  
judgment upon.

Here, in this section of Matthew,  
Jesus was teaching about ministry to people.

Particularly, about people who are well/stable  
enough to care for the suffering and abused.

Jesus was not sending perfect people into the world  
to bring good news to the people on  
the boundaries nor did he send people

that had it all together to go find siblings  
suffering from chronic poverty.

And those people that Jesus  
was calling are like most of us.  
People who are well/stable enough  
to bring good news.

Truly, everyone is well/stable enough

to bring good news.

Secondly, Jesus taught that people were like sheep, wandering, and not knowing of God's compassion.

So this is not a judgement announcement that is going to come at a later time.

Today's gospel includes a command to go out and be apostles, sent ones, proclaiming God's love and have God

put us into the position of helping others while putting ourselves (sometimes) in the position of danger.

It doesn't mean we are careless or reckless.

But it does mean we go out with out the items of comfort and security so that we train ourselves to trust in God (which is hard) and

(now this is the *really* hard one) to trust in other people, too.

And they're out there!

Some are Christians and many aren't!

Don't believe the lie that is so prevalent in our society that makes everything an "us vs. them."

When Jesus spoke about the Good Samaritan, it wasn't necessarily the point that we help our enemies  
(while that is a message in other places)

the message of the Good Samaritan is that we may be the one laying face down in a ditch dying and

the people we thought would help us have passed by and done nothing.

Yet, there's another coming down the road, in the distance we see them, and when they're close enough we find it is the least likely person to give aid.

Lo and behold, it is actually the one who saves your life.

In Jesus' parable that person was a Samaritan.

Who would that person be to you?

Such honesty will never defeat us.

The same way honesty to God  
can never defeat God.

It is in fact this kind of honest relationship  
God wants with all people. (Pause)

Jesus' messages will meet conflict  
until enough people realize  
their true nature. (2X)

That time hasn't come fully into being,  
But the harvest is plentiful.

So we squirm a bit with the knowledge  
that Jesus may not bring peace to everyone,  
even us... all the time.

But, we still give thanks and praise to God!

For we are not alone.

We come to know God's compassion for us and  
then we are sent out to share  
that compassion with others. (Pause)

(Introduce Andrea)

Today's Ministry Minute is from  
our very own Andrea Notley.

(Speech)

The great backpack giveaway is  
a way to participate in being  
sent by Christ.

It is the kind of ministry that has ripple effects  
that we may never get to see  
but that doesn't make them unimportant.

This is another way that we,  
at St. Stephen,  
are being sent.

AMEN!