

“Do We Want to Be Involved with This Guy?”

How many of us have applied for and received jobs that we wanted or thought we wanted? Then, when we got the job, we thought, “What was I thinking?” In many respects, this was what my last teaching position turned out to be, but I really did love the job. I was the “founding teacher” of the Social Emotional Learning program in the East Longmeadow Public Schools. They wanted someone who could pilot a program that could be started in the middle school and then be brought to the high school and elementary schools.

While this sounds all well and good, what I didn't plan on was teaching three grades at once and, sometimes, different subjects at the same time. Part of the whiteboard in my classroom was divided into ten blocks to plot out 6th-grade Math, English, and Science; 7th-grade Math, English, and Social Studies; and then 8th-grade Math and English. We did what we could to assimilate the students into 7th and 8th-grade Science. It took me a bit, but I finally got the hang of it as I relied on 25+ years of teaching, color coding, and organizing classrooms.

This story is relevant because, before today's Gospel lesson from Luke, Jesus had just chosen the 12 Apostles and taken them up to the mountain for private instruction. They have signed on for a job that they really didn't even know what was going to happen. But, I imagined they were really enthused. Now, as they came down the crowds gathered because of the reputation of Jesus--perhaps with Simon and the others catching boat-loads of fish.

I would like you to put yourselves in the place of the chosen twelve. They had just spent this great time with Jesus and heard things that we can only begin to imagine. Then, when they come down, he doesn't put himself on a boat but moves about the crowds teaching, right on their physical level. As I guess their thoughts, it would be something along the lines of "Oh, he isn't going to get on a boat today," or "He is awfully close to this crowd." And then, when Jesus tells them "Blessed are the poor..." they may have thought, "What the heck is this?" "Woe? What do you mean, 'woe'?" "What have we gotten ourselves into here, anyway?" "Do we really want to get involved with this guy?"

This Gospel was originally written for those people who had no Jewish roots or little understanding of God. They were not well-respected by the Jewish community and were looked at scornfully by those who had made the change from Judaism to “The Way” or early Christianity. Their own physical and spiritual needs may not have been met by those who were around them. Those who were fortunate to have food and be well-off were being introduced to the concept of sharing what they had. Everything needed to be explained to them. Once explained, they had to ask themselves the same question that the Chosen 12 had to ask, “Do we really want to get involved with this guy?”

We, too, in 2025 have to ask ourselves the same questions. Luckily, the answer was “yes.” The beautiful part of the “yes” is that the Chosen 12 even managed to mess things up, much like we do. In our hearts, we truly believe that we are going to be followers of Jesus as we put our following into practice. The reality check for us can be, though, in those areas when we question what we are doing or for whom we are doing what Jesus commanded. We also tend to question what it means to be “poor,” “hungry,” and to “weep.”

Here is the catch for us: for all of us here, no one knows what is going on in our homes and in our personal lives. Who here knows our whole financial situation? Who here knows if we are truly “poor” in spirit? Does anyone truly know that for which we hunger? We could be physically, emotionally, spiritually, or emotionally hungry (or poor, for that matter.) Each one of us has to answer that for him/herself and make what changes are necessary.

If we are hesitant to make any changes to our own lives, Jesus also has some words for us. I’d like you to think about the word “Woe” and replace it with “Warning!” Warning—those of you who are rich now will be poor later. Do something about it. Warning—those of you who think you are well-fed will be hungry later. Do we think we are truly “full?” Have we tried figured out that we are meant to share with others who might be hungry? Warning—those of you who are laughing now, you will be in tears later.

Let’s stop, think, and assess what Jesus might be saying to us. Those of us who worked hard for our money: do we hoard what we have or spend it lavishly without giving to those who are truly in need? For

those who are “full”: are we physically and spiritually fed? I’d like to think that some spiritual nourishment would come from your time on Sunday morning. Do we search for more? Do we share our actual and spiritual food with others in need? When did we last invite someone to church or offer to sit and pray with them? We will have two opportunities starting next month to be spiritually fed; will we take advantage of Breakfast with the Bible or the Book Study that will be held in the evening? Do we who are happy console those who are not?

You’d think we have evolved in the almost 2,000 years after the first followers of Jesus. However, we must continue to “be involved with this guy,” as we seek to bring the Kingdom or Reign of God on earth here in Westfield, Southwick, and to the rest of the world. Let us do our part to make sure that we stay focused on the message of Christ as we recognize that not everyone has what we think they have, that some people may need more than others, and that ultimately, we truly do “want to get involved” as we live out our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.