

Called to Share the Good News

By: Meagan McLaughlin

June 14, 2020. Pastor Meagan reflects on Jesus commissioning his disciples to carry the gospel to all the corners of the earth, and how in the wake of George Floyd, our call is to go out and tell the good news: that freedom is for all people.

Readings: [Exodus 19:2-8a](#), [Matthew 9:35-10:8 \[9-23\]](#), [Ephesians 2:14](#)

*** Transcript ***

On the surface, our gospel story today seems pretty simple. Jesus sees, with compassion, the need for people to hear the good news of God's love and healing and guidance. And he commissioned people — his disciples — to walk alongside him, to carry the gospel to all the corners of the earth. Jesus prepared them for their work: giving them power to heal, to cleanse, even to bring life where there was death. And out they went, 2000 years ago, to carry out Jesus' call. Simple, right?

On the surface, the end of slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation also seems pretty simple. Millions of people, children of God, had been kept in chains, abused, worked and sold for profit, treated for generations more like animals than human beings. And then, on January 1st of 1863, President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation — and the slaves, at least legally speaking, were released from their chains, and everything changed. After centuries of bondage, the people of African descent were free. An announcement was made, and slavery was over.

When we look closer, neither the story of Jesus sending out his disciples, nor the story of the freeing of millions of people who had lived in slavery, is as simple as it seems. Both stories warrant a little attention, especially this week. June 17th, we remember the anniversary of the execution of nine black people in Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, by a young white supremacist. The shooter was born, raised, Confirmed, and communed in the ELCA — which is to this day the whitest denomination in the country. From all of these stories we learn that freedom, healing, and transformation are not simple, one-time, individual events, but communal experiences of growth and change that can take years and even generations to be fully realized.

When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, it certainly meant the end of legal slavery. But it was far from the end of the story. For those living in chains, and for those whose whole lives had been formed in a world built on the institution of slavery, this declaration of freedom turned upside down the only world any of them ever knew. It required transformation at almost every level — financial, social, practical, physical, political — for everyone in the nation. The change would take generations. It certainly started with the signing of the Proclamation over 150 years ago, but what many of us don't realize is that it would be two-and-a-half years before the last of the slaves even knew of its passing. On June 19th, 1865, the Union Army finally reached Galveston, Texas, where the first order of business was to read the Emancipation Proclamation to the people of God still living in slavery there. In the midst of the wide-ranging reactions to the news, celebrations broke out — which are continued today, each June 19th, in a celebration known as Juneteenth.

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was only the beginning. The bringing of the good news to Galveston on Juneteenth was another step in that process. In order for freedom to come, the word needed to be spread. And that transformation continues. If we think about the events of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s that took place only about 60 years ago, and remember the nine lives lost to

white supremacy at Emanuel AME just 5 years ago, June 17th, and today watch the evening news and hear the grief and pain and fear and yes, even the rage of our black siblings in the wake of George Floyd's murder, we know there is still work for all of us to do in our nation, to fully live into and embrace the good news that started with the Emancipation Proclamation. At George Floyd's funeral, Reverend Al Sharpton called us to continue that work: "What happened to Floyd," he said, "happens every day in this country, in education, in health services, and in every area of American life. It's time for us to stand up in George's name and say, 'Get your knee off our necks.' The reason why we are marching all over the world is we were like George: we couldn't breathe, not because there was something wrong with our lungs, but because you wouldn't take your knee off our neck." So much pain. And such a hard word of truth.

When Jesus looked at the world around him, he knew, as we know today, that his world was hurting. Illness, death, division, poverty, and hunger. And he sent out the disciples, out of compassion, into this hurting world, to bring the good word. Not an empty word, but a word of promises made and kept, here and now. Healing. Life. Cleansing. And freedom. Jesus does not promise that the journey will be easy. He tells the disciples they are being sent out as sheep among wolves. He warns them they will face rejection. He invites them to let go of what they know, what makes them comfortable and secure.

I don't know about you, but I know how easy it has been, for much of my life, for me to rest in a place of familiarity and comfort, oblivious to the suffering of my black siblings. As I have heard the stories over time of the experiences of my black classmates and colleagues and friends that they have had in classrooms, and workplaces, and doctor's offices, and shopping malls, I have slowly been drawn out of my complacency, to understand that the world as I see or experience it has been designed to help me, as a white person, feel safe and comfortable. The murder of George Floyd is an act of such obvious and cruel racist violence that it has awakened the whole world it seems, to the oppression and fear that has existed for centuries. I have been awakened to the ways in which I have been complicit in this reality, simply because I haven't seen it. As the call to carry the good news continues today, as we are called to proclaim healing and freedom, we like the disciples face a daunting task. We too are asked to let go of what we know, and what makes us comfortable and secure, as we acknowledge the truths of the woundedness of this world that we have been taught not to see. We are asked to confront the ways in which we have, all of us, been formed in a culture that is tainted with racism and white supremacy. And we're called to actively work to dismantle those lies, within ourselves, and in the world around us. And when we fail to do this, we allow the suffering to continue unchecked.

Austin Channing Brown, a speaker and writer who is providing incredible leadership on racial justice, wrote this week, "I received an e-mail . . . from [someone] who wants to know how she can support racial justice but without risk. And I'm sorry to share, it's not possible. To be antiracist is to be active. It's to resist the status quo. It's raising your voice and making noise. It's protesting and declaring things must change. It's challenging supervisors and boards and executive teams and donors. Choosing antiracism is often choosing to be a nuisance."

The good news in all this: Jesus does not send the disciples, or us, out empty-handed. The disciples didn't start out ready to follow the call. Jesus equipped them, and equips us, for this mission, giving us the capacity to do what we are called to do. This week, as we remember at once the experience of the slaves in Galveston, Texas as they learned of their freedom over 150 year ago, the tragedy of the death of 9 black people at the hands of a white supremacist just 5 years ago, and the death of George Floyd and so many others in recent days, the call and commission Jesus gives to his disciples is for us too.

The call is clear: go out, and tell the good news. Claim the promise that freedom is for all people. The

Central States Synod Council, when they met last week via Zoom, wrote the following: “Our relationship to the shooter [of the Emmanuel 9], as well as to two of the slain, reminds us of both our complicity and our calling. Together we confess that we're in bondage to the sins of racism and white supremacy and, at the same time, we rejoice in the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus who 'has broken down the dividing walls, that is, the hostility between us' (Ephesians 2:14). May God continue to guide us as we seek repentance and renewal, and racial justice and reconciliation among God's precious children.” There is so much work to do, family of faith, it can feel overwhelming. And just when we think we have arrived, we will make mistakes, and will find out how much more we have to learn. But we don't go alone, and we start right where we are.

When asked what people should do to move forward from where we find ourselves, Reverend Angela Khabeb of Holy Trinity Lutheran in Minneapolis said to a reporter last week, “Dismantle white supremacy in our congregations and in our hearts. For each congregation, that process may begin in a different place. Wherever you're starting, you've got the world at your fingertips.” There are so many ways to make a difference. Vote, and help others register to vote. Watch the movie "13th" or "Just Mercy" to learn about our criminal justice system. Read a book such as *So You Want to Talk About Race*, by Ijeoma Oluo. Join a book study or other group committed to learning about racism — we are starting a group at Christ Lutheran soon. As the people said to Moses, when he shared God's direction with them in the first reading today, “Everything the Lord has spoken, *we* will do.” We will do it, together.

This is such hard work, family of faith. And the call to bring the message of God's love to the world will never be completed. We will never do it perfectly. But our God promises healing, and cleansing, and life, and freedom. Jesus called the disciples to embody the good news to the world. As they did so, they were freed of the illusions they lived in that separated them from their neighbors. Their eyes were opened to the beauty that is only evident in the abundant diversity of God's creation. They were freed from the fear of losing what was familiar, and secure. Their hearts were opened, and they were free to share, and to receive in full, the gift of God's presence that always surrounds us. In the words of Maya Angelou, “The truth is, no one of us can be free until everybody is free.”

Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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