

## Committed to Love

[Matthew 9:35-10:8\(9-23\)](#)

It is known for picketing events, including soldiers' funerals with signs that say things like "God hates Fags". They are currently declaring "The Coronavirus is God's Fury." The backbone of the church is the Phelps family, who under the leadership of the late Fred Phelps developed an idiosyncratic theology based on God's anger. To be a Phelps is to belong to the church and to belong to the church is to be a Phelps.

So, it is remarkable that one daughter, Megan Phelps, who was the official spokesperson for the church, broke away. Hers is a remarkable story of healing from a powerful narrative of hate. And the vehicle of her redemption was Twitter.

Yes, Twitter. Megan was posting the church's propaganda on Twitter and she was engaged by other people who asked questions. Rather than criticize or send hatred back to her, some people asked questions and genuinely engaged with her. This led her to reconsider the unique perspective that she had learned and to find her way to an alternative more healthy and life-giving understanding of scripture.

In this morning's gospel, Jesus sends his disciples out on a mission trip with instructions to "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." This is a big charge. And yet it is one that has been passed on from them, our spiritual ancestors to us. We too, people of God, we too are charged to "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons." Throughout history, Christians have built hospitals and schools in response to this command.

Today the world is a different place and we are being called to practice a different kind of healing ministry. We are being called to practice the ministry of committed love. We are being called to demonstrate and live God's unconditional love in the world wherever we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. We are called to be as committed to love as the Westboro Baptist Church has been committed to hate.

In the past weeks and months, we have seen in a new way how unequal our society is. We have seen in a new way that the white are privileged and the wealthy are privileged. Yes we knew it before but now we see it written large in front of our faces. We can no longer ignore the economic and racial inequalities not just in the world but in American society. The great democratic experiment is failing. The planet is overheating and dying. We are living with a pandemic the like of which has not been seen before, millions are facing imminent starvation and black people are being shot in our streets.

And we, the people of God, are called to "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons."

That's not the language we use most often. Instead we talk about reconciliation. Our mission is to be a people committed to reconciliation, which is much the same as being committed to love and peace. The Prayer Book puts like this, "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to

unity with God and each other in Christ.” So our ministry is to restore all people to unity which means to bring reconciliation, to bring peace, to bring healing.

How are you living out that ministry?

In the great commandments, Jesus taught us to love God, our neighbor and ourselves. This is not a passive but an active command. Love is an active verb.

We as a church are committed to love our neighbors in partnership with Los Osos Cares through providing dinner, and in partnership with 40 Prado by providing lunch regularly. These are some practical ways that we bring the love of God but even more important is the respect and care that we show for each individual whom we serve. They are not just a group of homogenous hungry people. Each one is a precious individual who deserves our full respect and commitment to relationship. In our baptismal vows we promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons” which means seeing everyone we meet as someone who is valuable in God’s eyes and therefore the most important person to us in that moment.

But it is not just individuals that we need to love and heal. We are called to bring healing to society and we are not going to achieve that by simply working locally. We have to use our ability to impact the wider world. We have two opportunities this week. Both of them we can do from the comfort of our own living rooms.

On Friday at 2:30, Pat Henry is presenting a panel called “Black Lives, White Privilege – a Time to Change”. This is on Zoom at the usual address and gives us the unique opportunity to hear from Black folk about their experience and to learn how we can help in the most effective ways – how we can dismantle the systemic racism within our hearts and institutions. I am very grateful to Pat for agreeing to do this. Many black people are saying that the information is out there and to continue to educate white people is in itself a form of oppression. So let us treasure this opportunity and not use it as an excuse to continue to do nothing. Our commitment to love demands that we take the actions we can.

The other opportunity this week is to join in the Poor People’s March on Washington. Usually this would require traveling to Washington DC but this year it is on-line and so we can join in. The Episcopal Church is in partnership with the Poor People’s Campaign to bring attention to the inequalities in society and to demand change. Their moral agenda demands that black people and others be given full voting rights, that all have full access to education and that the increasing gap between rich and poor is addressed head-on.

Our baptismal vows call us to strive for justice and peace among all people. We agreed to do that. We vowed to do that. One way we can do that is by showing up and making our voices heard. This is the way we show our commitment to love.

There is much to be done. As Jesus told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” We can support the work of others by our prayers. Let us not just support organizations who are working for justice with our financial contributions or volunteer labor, but also with our prayers.

Jesus told his disciples not to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans. That would come later. This mission was to the Jewish people. None of us can do everything, so let us listen to where God is directing our hearts and let us make a full commitment to do all we can in that sphere. It is like a quilt. Each one of us has her own square to work. The Holy Spirit will direct the project, showing us what colors to use, what thread to sew with and will then bring our squares together with others and make the most beautiful quilt of peace and reconciliation that we can imagine.

I started by telling you about Megan Phelps. Megan Phelps received remarkable healing because people engaged her on Twitter. They did not have to go anywhere to bring love to her. We can still love and love passionately even when we stay home. We can engage gently and lovingly with others on Facebook or Instagram. We can engage forcefully with our elected officials. We can co-create with God through the power of prayer.

People of God, we are called to heal, we are called to bring peace, we are called to bring reconciliation. Our commitment to love must be as great as other's commitment to hate. We cannot fail when we are doing God's work. We can only fail by not getting on with it.

People, let's roll.