

## Why not us?

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy one.

As I was beginning my discernment process, I struggled to understand why God would be calling me to ministry. I hadn't been a part of the church for that long, and I was a part of the LGBTQ+ community, which wasn't quite accepted fully, and I was a little unsure because I hadn't really seen many folks who identified like me serving in church leadership. I wasn't sure if I was ready to be out in front. It would take me a long time to say yes to that question. Fear can be a powerful barrier. But at some point, God's voice was stronger than my fear, and the climate around acceptance began to shift. More importantly, my questions shifted. It wasn't Why shouldn't I do this but the simple question, why not me? It was less about who I was and more about how I could serve. Maybe I could be the example I had been looking for, for those who would come after me. Maybe the people encouraging me to pursue this call saw the skills I brought with me as helpful qualities. I think that's one reason our text for today resonates so deeply with me.

In our gospel text for today, we find Matthew's version of the commissioning of the twelve disciples. There are parallel accounts in Mark and Luke which is why this passage may sound familiar but not be how we remember it. In Matthew's accounting of the commissioning,

Jesus also calls the disciples by name, and we again see that Jesus wasn't looking for perfection, wealth, or for those people who had everything together. He calls a tax collector and Judas, who betrays him along with the others who have interesting stories of their own full of imperfections and challenges. The path at this time was a dangerous and one that required the ability to travel light, shake the dust off their feet and move on when their message wasn't welcomed. They knew the road ahead wouldn't be an easy one, and yet they chose to move forward.

In some way, they become an answer to the prayer offered up at the opening of the text when Jesus says, "Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

As Jesus sends out the disciples, he gives them the authority to heal and raise the dead.

We are keen to notice that one thing is missing from this commissioning.

Jesus authorizes many disciples' actions but not teaching, at least not of their own creation.

The focus here is on the disciples' actions and less on their words. The text goes on to assure them that when they need to speak, it will be the Spirit of God speaking through them.

In the commissioning of the disciples, we glean additional clues about what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We hear that we

should travel light and know that the journey ahead will not be an easy one.

With the ominous warnings at the end of the text, we see Jesus trying to prepare his disciples for their long and arduous road ahead together.

While this text leaves us sitting in a space of ominous warnings, and heavy hearts, it meets us where we often find ourselves in lived reality.

Sometimes we feel like the sheep amidst the wolves, looking for a shepherd or thinking we have found one only to realize that it was just a tree. Sometimes it's easy to get distracted from our path.

Wondering can be difficult, and yet it can lead us down paths we had never considered.

I can only imagine how the disciples made sense of their lives as they started out on their journeys. When they sat around at dinner, I wonder if they ever talked about the plans they once had for their lives that had now been forever changed. Or if they looked at each other and simply said I didn't expect to be here, but how blessed we are. Or maybe they said I wonder if we should have taken notes that all sounded pretty serious. Now all joking aside

At this point in their journey, it isn't about a destination for the disciples. They are being asked to be focused on the journey. To be focused on the mission they are being commissioned for. To do their

best not to focus on distractions or worry about things like what to say because God will provide that for them. To travel light.

I think this text, in all its complexity, can be of great comfort for us in our own time of Wondering and transition, whether that be within our congregation or in our own lives. To know that God will be there alongside us can be of great comfort, as is knowing that this community is our strength together, commissioned to do the work of figuring it out together.

Called to be God's own and loved as we are. Imperfect, beautiful souls doing the best we can each and every day.

Loving the people of this congregation and doing our best to connect with the community around us.

There are so many examples throughout the scriptures of imperfect people and communities being called to serve as disciples, and their journey isn't that they then become perfect but come to learn God's grace and love for them, helping them feel a little less alone. Reminding them that there is a community of disciples alongside them and Jesus who always walks with them in fear and doubt.

I love it when the text is complex because our lives are complicated. When there isn't a clean parable to point to or just one very truly I tell you teaching moment.

That's when I get excited because rarely are our lives that clean and tidy. At the same time, those gospel moments might be a little easier to craft a sermon around.

Yet they may not give us the same access to the meaty parts of our spiritual journey. The parts we don't always let ourselves sit in. Moments like our reading today where the wolves are coming after us, and we aren't sure if the shepherd is coming back or if we are now a sheep dressed like a shepherd because that's just how we do things now or if we are even using the right analogies anymore.

And yet our text today calls us to be fully present to our mission as a community called to be Jesus' disciples in our modern context. To hear the commissioning of the disciples in today's gospel and understand that we, too, are called to work towards healing and reconciliation in a challenging time. Knowing that we are not alone, we work in community guided by the Spirit of God. Even if we still aren't sure what it is, we are being called to.

Just as I hesitated to answer God's call before going to Seminary, sometimes we must change the question. Why not us?

Together we are stronger than any one of us alone. Our text for today recognizes the need for people along our journey. Those people might just be us. Sometimes we can find unexpected connections in familiar places. Or new pathways opening in ways we weren't

expecting. Each of us can engage with the idea of how we are being called or commissioned in our ministries, even when we are exhausted.

My prayer for us all is that this week we can take time to be grateful for the gift of this community, discern how we want to continue serving alongside it, and feel the hope and peace of God's presence in that process. Amen