

He's a busy college student. Along with taking classes, and working a part-time job, he volunteers at a health care center for the homeless. He goes three times a week, doing what he can for those who come in, offering a comforting word, signing them up to see a nurse, helping them with the medical questionnaire. After he'd been coming for a while, one of the nurses asked why he added this volunteer work to his already busy schedule. He surprised himself with the directness of his answer, "I'm a Christian; it's the kind of thing I believe I'm called to do."

I think he's an illustration of today's Gospel reading.

Jesus calls people to him. We're here today because he's called us. He's done things for us we couldn't do ourselves, saved us and made us part of his reign. He gives us gifts of peace and joy, and more.

Part of the *more* he gives us is a purpose. Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus commissions those he blesses; he gives them something to do. He sends out 70 followers, commissions them to do the same things he does. He heals, teaches, preaches and saves, but he doesn't intend to keep doing it all by himself. So, he commissions them to do the same work he does. He "co-missions" them, shares his mission with them, and makes them co-workers in it. He doesn't work alone. He gets people to share his mission.

That would suggest, that when we think of Jesus and all the good things he gives us, we ought to also to think of all the good things he gives us to give to the world. The good things he gives us... Why? Not to keep for ourselves, but to give to the world. He gives it all to us, so we can pass it on.

Jesus sends the 70 out to make real a new creation, what he called the Kingdom of God, where God's love rules. This new creation dawns as we let go of preoccupation with our self – with self-fulfillment and self-securing. Because this new creation brings the rule of God's love into people's lives, it has to come through those who've died to the self-focused life to be reborn with a new focus - outside themselves. That change must happen; those preoccupied with self have no power for the new creation. That's why Jesus gives such specific instructions about what not to take or worry about. They mustn't worry about themselves, but trust God's care. That's the only way they'll be free to focus on others.

Freedom from self-focus is what gives him, and will give them, transforming power. It's what makes things new. We can't share that newness till we're grateful and trusting enough to receive it ourselves.

So, are you grateful for what Jesus has done for you, grateful enough to want to share the good news of his love? Do you trust God to help you do it? If so, where do you think he's commissioned you to work in his name? How do you think he wants you to take his message – the good news of God's Kingdom – and make it real for others? What would it mean to do that? Where would you need to let go of old preoccupations about your self – popularity, security, or desires – in order to make God's love real in serving others? And what gifts has he given you, not to serve old self-preoccupations, but to do the work of God's Kingdom? In other words, how ready are you to do the work of his new creation?

Jesus gives the 70 hard work to do. They're not to burden themselves with lots of baggage. They're to expect rejection and resistance. In fact, they can expect to receive some of the same rejection to their serving Jesus that Jesus himself receives for serving God and us. It won't be easy!

Yet, Jesus says that in them God's reign is coming. We pray, "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus shows that in ordinary people, called to do extraordinary work, God's reign is coming into the world. The petition of the Lord's Prayer is being fulfilled, through them!

The 70 return joyful that they've seen this happen, God's reign coming through them. They could've never known that joy without going and doing what he commanded, without accepting his co-mission!

As we end another week of IHN hosting, it strikes me that a crucial part of our being blessed with the fulfillment of what we pray for every week when we say, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven" – is that we have to be the ones God uses to do the doing, the ones through whom God's will is done. It always inspires me that we're willing to do this part of it. It's not a given.

A member of a class I attend at the "Y" told me that she was chair of her church's Mission Committee years ago when Rollie Seguin and Carolyn Hofmann came to talk about IHN, the good it could do for homeless families, and how it could nurture compassion and mission in their church. But, she said, "You should've heard the excuses for doing nothing." In spite of the need and the good the work could bring to their church, people responded with, "I'm too busy." "I don't want to be tied down." Or "I want to be free to go on vacation." Her frustration still showed when she said, "Do you think Jesus expects us to take a vacation from being a Christian?"

Of course, he doesn't. Yet most of us want to keep our being commissioned by Jesus, joining his mission, limited, part-time, something we can pick up or put down as we please. James Howell reminds us that, in spite of the reasons for this, it's meant to be a full-time affair. He says:

"Over time, we get our lives organized; we have our commitments, our busy-ness: work, mortgage, school, sports, social life. We aren't evil; we may even do some good. But we are pretty much booked – and then we turn to God and say, "Hmm. I have 5 minutes and \$5.00 left over. I want to be a Christian, so here, God: I'll give you what I've got *left*." Then we feel fairly noble: "I gave what I had *left* to God." But what Jesus wants, no, expects us to say, is, "God, it's *all* yours. *All!* No prior commitment is sacred. Whatever you want me to do with *all* of my time, whatever you want me to do with *all* of my energy, with *all* of my possessions, with *all* of my wealth, whatever I have: God, it's *all* yours. I hold nothing back for myself."

Yes, there are all kinds of reasons for resisting the good news that *we*, ourselves, here and now, can share in the work of God's kingdom. But that doesn't mean that the news isn't true. You've shown me it's true! Whenever I think of all who do the on-going work of committees, classes, and choirs, I'm reminded of Jesus' commissioning ordinary people to do the extraordinary work of the Kingdom!

The church, Christ's body in the world, is in the business of commissioning. We call people in so that we can send them out in Christ's name. One of our great tasks is to, in Paul's words, "equip the saints." We're to nurture the gratitude and faith needed to do ministry with Jesus. This passage is a picture of that. We're to be constantly summoning new disciples and then commissioning them to do Jesus' work.

This sharing the work, this co-missioning, even when it's easier, more comfortable, or less challenging, to do it ourselves, is central to our faith. It's part of nurturing one another in faith, part of "making disciples" for Jesus. We need to be teaching and modeling the fact that this work is inseparable from our faith. When we do, what blessings there can be, for others, for our faith family, and for the world.

Today we celebrate our national independence. There is much to celebrate and honor. Freedom is a noble virtue that many have sacrificed to preserve and which we must uphold. Yet Jesus calls us to celebrate other virtues: dependence, obedience, and service, to him as even greater virtues.

Today I'd like to lift up some opportunities to exercise those virtues, right here in our faith family. Some are listed on page in the bulletin, "Jesus Calls Us." I invite you to consider where he might want to co-mission you, ask you to share his mission with him. If you don't see something on the list, don't give up; he has work for you to do somewhere. And he won't give up until your doing it. Amen.

Lord Jesus, we're amazed that you've called people like us to do work like yours.
We know our limits; we know the greatness of your work!

And yet, if your work is to be done in this world, it's up to us to respond to your call,
...to confirm your confidence in us, and to serve you as best we can.

So today, we ask that you help us hear your call, you're co-missioning,
...and then help us to respond to the specific work you may have for us to do.

Guide us as we consider the possibilities that have been shared with us, here today,
...and help us to be open to others, also, that may be in your heart for us.

Thank you for reminding us that all this begins with our need to let go of all self-preoccupation -
...preoccupation with position, image, status, security, or any other desire,
...so we can be free to be occupied, focused on you, the good news of your love, and on others,
...sharing that love with them in whatever way it's needed.

Give us the gratitude for your love, the trust in your continuing presence and care,
...that will enable us to be the new creation – focused on you and others –
...so we can show its newness to others.

Give us the strength to do that when we need it most,
...when we are rejected or put down because of our focus on you,
...when our giving arouses jealousy or resentment in those who fear the freedom to be so selfless
...and are threatened by the sight of it in others,
...when hardship or apparent failure tempts us to give up, and turn to an easier way.

We thank you for the many and varied gifts which you've us individually and as a faith family
...to help us do your work and honor you.

We thank you for the times when we've been able to receive and speak wisdom, endure and triumph,
...heal and redeem in your name.

Because, as with those first 70, you've sent us out as sheep among wolves,
...we pray for those who can be like wolves -
...those who have sown suspicion and fear,
...those who have started or spread gossip,
...for those who move among your people for their own gain,
...for those who take delight in failure or the perception of failure,
...asking that you bless them healing, so that they will receive your grace with gladness,
...and desire that your will be done, now, on earth as it is in heaven.

Today, we as we pray for our work for your kingdom, we pray also for our country.

We begin by asking you to help us always be clear that the two are not the same,

...and to remember that our highest calling is to serve your kingdom here where we are free to do so.

We thank you for all who have made, and even now are making, great sacrifices for that freedom.

Be with our leaders, those who serve in our military, those working to save our natural inheritance,
...in these days especially on the Gulf coast, but not only there, everywhere.

Grateful for your call to share your work, we pray for those known to us with special needs: