

**“The Gifts at Harvest Time”**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**June 14, 2020**

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**Iao United Church of Christ**

**Romans 5:1-8**

**Matthew 9:35-10:10**

At a time such as this – we are witnessing an unsee-able virus, and most recently the killing of George Floyd, another human being. I have to say, that in my lifetime – I can somewhat relate to the racial profiling that many of our brothers and sisters in the black community experience on a daily basis, but my experience cannot nearly be that of what they have experienced for over 400 years. I once used to be afraid of entering an airport. Not because I was afraid of flying, but the experience, the anxiety from when I first entered the airport, to when I finally was seated on the plane. As soon as I entered the airport, and many of us people of color might be able to relate – we get “the look.” If you are a person of color, many of us know about – “the look.” Experience the pulling off to the side for that “extra security check.” Experience the “no – you need to go through this line.” Many of us have experienced some sort of

stereotyping – gay, straight, bi, lesbian, white, black, brown, fat, thin, tall, short, dumb, smart – and the list goes on and on. We too have done this same type of stereotyping ourselves toward others. For hundreds of years our black brothers and sisters have had to endure many of society’s stereotypes. Today, last week, a month ago has been no different. There comes a time in society that those who have been discriminated against, marginalized – that a particular group that as been oppressed for so long finally stand up and say “NO MORE!” People have said “NO MORE!” “BASTA!” “ENOUGH!” “NO MAS!” – “NO MORE!”

Last week we talked about how the Church needs to be on Main Street of society. When I first got called to be the Pastor of this amazing Church we call Iao United Church of Christ – I made this statement that I first heard in seminary and in the Church Revitalization Workshop – “If the Church wants to know what God is calling it to do – it has to go out into the community for that call.” For far too long, many Churches have isolated themselves from Main Street and has lost its direction and call. At times, it does not hear the call “I can’t breathe” because it is out of touch with what is happening on Main Street of society. The Church doesn’t hear – “I’m hungry or I thirst”

because it has isolated itself away from Main Street of society. Especially today – for our time in history – we must know what is happening with God’s people out there in our societies. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few – because the Church has lost touch with the community. The Church must be in touch with real people, with the real lives of people – out in the real world of today. Without stereotyping them. The Church must be in collaboration with local agencies and build on these partnerships. Bridge building is part of our call – even in our virtual world. Anyone, including the Church can fall prey to stereotyping – their cheats, liars, bums, losers – our call as a Church as the new harvests of our time is to bring to bear our gifts of healing, love, and maybe the most important one for us today is that of compassion. When we walk on Main Street of our societies, we see people who are hurting – people who are tired and angry of being marginalized, profiled, people who are tired of having a knee on their necks. We can either join in with the stereotyping them as looters, bums, no good – or we can lead with compassion and see them as God’s children – as fellow human beings. Some may need shepherding, but we can do that by our own example of love. One of our members has stated this

extremely well. “Broken children lead to broken adults.” I fully agree with this statement in as far as we as a society and as a church are given an opportunity to shepherd people into being unbroken, by how we treat one another with compassion and love and how we take our knees off each other’s necks. As harvesters of our time – we have to work for it – being a Church of Christ comes with hard work – comes with difficult decision making – because that’s what a Church on Main Street of society is called to do – work for justice, work for peace, work on our call, and work to towards love. We must be like Christ – even if it means to turn over tables for the sake of another group of our society and for the sake of justice. At some point, we must get to a point of “NO MORE!” “ENOUGH!” – to an unjust society.

I truly believe that compassion is what led Jesus to send his disciples to walk the streets – the Main Streets of their time – even if it included alleyways, side ways, byways – wherever God’s people needed to hear the “Good News.” I truly believe, just as Jesus gave authority to the disciples over unclean spirits, we are given the authority to dispel racism and injustice.

Look at the interesting part of today's Gospel reading. "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Beloved church, beloved virtual community – notice how Jesus didn't say that the Gentiles or the Samaritans were "lost sheep" he is saying that the house of Israel was lost. This particular passage is remarkably interesting for me about "stereotyping and racial profiling" and since it follows the passage in chapter 7 of Matthew beginning with verse 1: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." Here we go beloved community. I believe Jesus is keeping the disciples away from the Samaritans and Gentiles for a reason. It was well known that Jews didn't get along with Samaritans or Gentiles. So, it seems that Jesus is telling his disciples that we need to clean up our own house first! How can we tell the Samaritans

and Gentiles about the “Good News” if our house is corrupt or if the sheep in our house are lost?” How can we tell other communities to “clean-up” their act if our own community is lost? How can anyone of us tell our black brothers and sisters to “clean-up” their act if our house is corrupt with racism, sexism, economic disparities, etc. etc. etc. Bishop Yvette Flunder – one of my seminary mentors, who is the Pastor of City of Refuge in Oakland California said it best in one of her sermons which I believe talks about the racial injustices and racial disparities in our country: “if you (you as in the racist white or whatever other color one might insert here) didn’t want us (us as in the black community) – if you didn’t want us in this country – then you should have picked your own cotton!” Amen and amen Bishop Flunder! When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well – he didn’t exclude her from the “living water” he has to offer – in fact in chapter 4 of the Gospel of John, we read “see how the fields are ripe for harvesting?” So it is not that Jesus was excluding the Samaritans and Gentiles from the “Good News” of God’s kingdom – He needed to have the house of Israel clean up their act first – “remove the speck from your own eye first.”

Beloved Iao Church – just as Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the “Good News” – we too are sent out to tell our Iao story. To tell our “Good News” to those who may hear. But before we do that – we must examine ourselves and rid ourselves of any prejudice or stereotyping or anything that is harmful and hurtful theology that can cause spiritual harm to others. We must go forth as God’s Commissioned people for the harvest – to be and do the “Good News” in our community. Humble ourselves as servants of God – not with all the answers – but as fellow sojourners with others in our flock.

Let us close with this – we know that “All lives matter!” We know that “Blue lives matter!” – but today – at this point in history – our beloved brothers and sisters in our black communities are asking that we take our knees off their necks as they scream “I can’t breathe!” Black lives do matter! Church! Black lives do matter! The harvest is full of diversity – let us cherish this as God’s beloved children of ALL colors!

**Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho and Alleluia.**