

June 18, 2023
“Ignited: Poured Out”
Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8
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Have you ever been faced with an overwhelming task? Sometimes, I look around my house and wonder how it will ever get clean. Or, maybe when you were in school, it seemed like that homework assignment was impossible. Think you need to drop 10 pounds? Exercising and eating right can also seem overwhelming. I once had a friend who was in the process of adopting, and she talked about the paperwork that needed to be done. She said it amounted to about 3 feet tall.

Simple, everyday things like this can seem overwhelming at times, let alone all of the needs that we see in our world. We turn on the news or open up Facebook/Instagram, or walk out our doors, and everywhere we look, we see hurt and lonely people. People who are struggling to make ends meet. People who are ill. People afflicted by racism, sexism, elitism, all the isms and all the phobias. Story after story, day after day, we see or hear of people who are hurting and struggling and in need. It can all be just so overwhelming. Have you ever wondered if you could make a difference? Sometimes, I think, “God- I want to share your love, but I’m just one person and I have no idea where to begin.”

Well, there's an old story, an old parable, that helps us think about all the world needs in a new light. You may have heard this one, but I find that it doesn't hurt to be reminded of it every once in a while.

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often, and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still, and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!"

adapted from The Star Thrower, by Loren Eiseley (1907 – 1977)
(<https://eventsforchange.wordpress.com/2011/06/05/the-starfish-story-one-step-towards-changing-the-world/>)

This parable helps remind us that we can make a difference even when a task seems overwhelming. We don't have to do everything, but we are all called to do something.

When Jesus looked out over the crowds, He could have been overwhelmed. Instead, when He saw them, the scripture tells us that He had compassion for them because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus saw each one. He saw the needs that they brought. He saw their illness, their suffering, their heartbreak and their hopelessness. And His heart was moved. They were lost.

If that doesn't describe our world! It is full of those who are hurt, those who feel abandoned, those who feel discriminated against and made to feel less than. Our world is full of those who feel lost, harassed, in need of someone who will see them, care for them, embrace them and give them hope that God's kingdom is here.

And friends, just as He saw those who were gathered there in Judea, He sees each one in our world who is hurting and in need of healing, hope, and salvation. He sees them, and His heart is moved for the lost and the lonely. "The size of the harvest is bigger than you can imagine"—the need is great, and you and I are needed to make a difference.

For Jesus calls us to go out, just as He sent out His disciples to impact one life at a time. He sent them out to do all the things that they had seen Him do—teaching, proclaiming, healing. For a time, the disciples had been walking with Jesus. They had seen Him heal others. They had watched as He drew seekers closer to Him and to God. They had seen the lame walk, the blind see, demons cast out. Person after person had been healed and made whole through Christ. And we're not talking about those who lived a perfect life, or the rich, those that we would think would deserve these things. But we were talking about ordinary people who often lived on the outskirts of society. Those who were rejected, neglected, and who

really needed community and hope. The disciples had witnessed all that Jesus had done! He had poured out His spirit among them. And they were about to find out what He could do through them.

Matthew chapter 10 tells us that Jesus called His 12 disciples and told them, "as you go, proclaim the good news, 'the Kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." Jesus had been pouring into them as they journeyed together. He had called them, walked beside of them, filling them, and now He was sending them. Now, it was their turn to take the love that Jesus had poured onto them and to share it with others.

This is what God does for us, as well. Jesus has pulled each of us to His side, He has called each of us to His side, He has poured out His love on us, and we are being sent to take that love and pour it out onto others. Like the disciples in our scripture reading today, we are called to go to those who are hurting and lonely and suffering, and to bring them hope, to proclaim the good news, to care for the sick, to help those who feel dead to come back to life, to welcome those who have been cast out to the edges of society, and to offer healing and hope to the hurting.

But this is a big job, isn't it?! And it can be scary. What will people think? How will people respond? What will we say or do? We often think that we don't know enough, that we aren't good enough, that God can't possibly use us, can He? If we were to see this as the job description of a disciple, a follower of Christ, most of us would feel like we don't qualify.

Jesus was pretty clear that this wouldn't be an easy task. He acknowledges to the disciples that they will face rejection, but He promises that His spirit will go with them, and that God will give them the words to say when they need it.

Someone once said that God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called. This is another way of saying that we don't have to know everything or be good at everything or be perfect for God to work through us. The Bible is full of people, ordinary people, that God has worked through to bring light and hope and life to the world.

So, what does this look like for us? The world is still full of people in need. And being a follower of Jesus means pouring out onto others the love that has been poured out onto us. We sometimes squirm at the word *call*, thinking that God only calls pastors, but God calls all of us to share His love and justice with the world. It's that nudge, that thought that you can't let go of, it's that person whose face just pops into your mind. God has given us so much that we need to share with others, for there are many who move our hearts, who move God's heart.

Where might God be nudging you to teach, to proclaim, to bring healing? Is there someone coming to mind today that you can pour love onto? Is there somewhere that you could be a healing balm? Can you stand up for someone when others don't? Where is God calling you to step beyond your comfort zone, trusting that He will be with you each step? How do we get over our fears- our fear of rejection, of failure, of whatever?

Sometimes, we just have to take the next right step and trust that God will be there for us.

I wanted you to have the chance to meet Ann Cherry today. Ann- if you want to come up. Ann is a member of our congregation, and I asked her to share a little bit with you today about how she felt God nudging her into a new ministry that took her outside of her comfort zone and that has become a joy and blessing to her and to others.

God doesn't call the equipped. God equips the called. God gives us exactly what we need to do the things that He calls us to do. (Thank you Jesus!) I think of the church as our refueling station. It's where we come to refill our tanks, our cups, so that we can go out and serve where God leads us. We can't make a difference for others when our tanks are empty, but what a difference we can make when our cup runneth over!

As I look around this room, I see the faces of those whom God has called. He has called you to Himself, He has poured out His Spirit onto you, and He now sends you into the world, to teach, to heal, to proclaim that a world of love and light is not only possible but is a reality through Christ. The harvest, the needs, are great, but the laborers are few— God is calling each of us to be laborers, to make a difference, one person at a time. For the love that God has poured out on us, we are sent to pour into one another.