

# Like Brother Love, Jesus Sends us Out to Be the Good News to Others<sup>1</sup>

June 14, 2020

## I

Like most of you, David and I have been spending a lot of time at home these past few weeks. And when we take our walks around the neighborhood, or sit on the front porch or deck we listen to music – to a Pandora station, to be specific. And lately we’ve been listening to the Neil Diamond station. And I have to tell you that when his song, “Brother Love’s Traveling Salvation Show” comes on, I can’t sit still. The lyrics just stir that street corner preacher in me! When Brother Love enters the traveling show’s tent, the music builds and builds ... “starting soft and slow. Like a small earthquake. And when he lets go, half the valley shakes. ... So pack up the babies and grab the old ladies and everyone goes ... ’cause everyone knows ’bout Brother Love’s show.”

And then Brother gets to his main point: “Now you got yourself two good hands ... and when your brother is troubled, you gotta reach out your hand to him ’cause that’s what it’s there for. And when your heart is troubled, you gotta reach out your other hand. Reach it out to the Man up there. ’Cause that’s what He’s there for.”

And then the ending chorus: “Take my hand in yours. Walk with me this day. In my heart I know, I will never stray ... Alleluia ...” And so the song goes. Wonderful!

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Well anyway, there’s an outfit based in Florida called “Street Bishops” that claims the authority to ordain anyone this week, advertising that “ordination should be given to all who ask, regardless of their theological training.” Apparently, the only commitment you have to make is to serving “lost sheep” and following the guidance and love of God. And so if you just send in \$29.95, you’ll receive a “professionally printed” 8x10 color certificate, along with a “Proof of Minister Certification” in your name. (Who knows. Maybe that’s where Brother Love got his license to preach that tent revival!)

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Well enough of that. And you know, that Street Bishop thing is kind of funny. But when you stop and think about it, this Florida outfit, Street Bishops, as well as Brother Love’s tent revival scene, actually do come a bit closer to Jesus sending out the twelve in today’s Gospel story ... closer to that missionary urgency, closer to that Gospel strike-while-the-iron-is-hot ... than a lot that you see going on in some churches these days. So let’s look.

## II

In today's Gospel reading from Matthew, sometimes referred to as the "sending" passage, Jesus sends his Disciples out to preach, to heal, to announce the coming of God's Kingdom. So here Jesus is, summoning the twelve and sending them out ... like sheep among wolves, He says a bit later. And if you think about it a bit, can't you just imagine a kind of confrontation? I mean, imagine yourself sitting there, perfectly content to be a follower ... basking in the glow of Jesus' company ... trailing Him around, traipsing around the countryside, watching Him heal and forgive and restore life and limb to all he touches.

So there you are, safe in His little circle, when Jesus drags Himself home, weary to the bone from a preaching mission, and informs you that the harvest indeed is rich, but the laborers are few. So he's decided to anoint the lot of you, giving some of His power and authority ... to you!

And then the next thing you know, he lays a hand on your head, praying a prayer that send chills down your spine. And then he starts giving out marching orders. Says, "Leave your billfolds behind, everyone of you. You're gonna go barefoot, and you're not even gonna need a backpack. 'Cause God will provide ... God will provide all you really need ... and all those you visit will see that God does provide.

And then Jesus says, "Wherever you go, I want you to heal the sick and raise the dead and cleanse the outcasts ... cast out demons ... preaching the coming of God's Kingdom. Now go on, get out of here. Go, go ... get!"

And you just sit there, stunned. "Jesus says I'm gonna cure the sick ... really? Raise the dead? I don't think so. Cleanse the lepers? Cast out demons?"

No, no, no. Jesus. I mean you sure can do all that, but not me! I mean, do you really know who you're talking to, who you're sending?

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OK, let's think a minute. And ponder a question. Have you heard these sending words before? See, here you and I are, sitting comfortably in our Sunday morning "hideaway" – together, we hope, before too long, but together now in spirit.

And so there you are, hearing your favorite stories, being nourished by gifts like healing and forgiveness and reconciliation. And then one Sunday morning, the Holy Spirit opens your ears and you actually hear the words that are spoken every Sunday at the end of every service. Words you hear ringing forth usually from the back of the church, the words that shout, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." Or, "Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit! Alleluia, alleluia!"

See, those are not sending words that aim at your comfort, sending words mumbled to members of a private club who happen to know the secret password, members just coming to consume the Good News for themselves once a week.

No, these are sending words shouted to those being sent, to those who're meant to be providers, not just consumers; those meant to be God's agents, God's sheep sent into the world of wolves to raise the dead, heal the faint-hearted ... heal the pain, the isolation, the demons, the sadness ... the hardest parts of the human condition ... sent forth in the name of Christ.

Now, your sending here at St. Martin's might not happen exactly like the Gospel's twelve ... but it happens. It happens. Let's think.

### III

See, you and I are being sent if we just have ears to hear. But here's the thing: I'm afraid maybe that you and I've heard this passage ... many of us, anyway, have heard it so often that it just doesn't have the sharp edge to it that it must have had for those first twelve.

See, they'd witnessed what Jesus could do all right ... had stood at the grave of Lazarus, had seen the raising of the dead, had seen the leper's skin turn rosey pink. Saw Jesus do all that. But here's Jesus, telling the twelve that they were now gonna do just what they'd seen Him do.

Oh, I guess He could have said, "It's true you're not me. So you can just continue traipsing along, assisting me ... assisting me in what only I can do ... you can collect the baskets of food left over, you can just clean up the tomb when the dead walk forth. 'Cause ... you're not ... me!

But He didn't do that. No, in fact, He gave the twelve some of His power. And like Brother Love's sending from that tent, these twelve were sent with very little training and no how-to manuals. He just sent them out to "heal the wounds, restore the outcasts and bring the dead to life." To announce the Kingdom of God.

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And God knows there's work to be done! Thinking about the horrible news of our day, that awful cry, "I can't breathe," is the daily cry of too many both here and across the world who live in squalor, are unemployed and unemployable, are poor and hungry, and who cannot breathe because of all this and more.

But here's the thing: Like a friend of mine insists, I don't believe that means "a cry for handouts or cheap reconciliation; it is a cry for justice, for dignity, a cry for life."

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Finally, I do think this: “Preaching the Kingdom without doing anything about it is just empty politics. And good works without God’s Good News is no more than a temporary reprieve.” But now if you put it all together, if you preach the Kingdom while acting it out, if you preach the good news while being the good news to those you touch, then that’s called God’s power. God’s power! And that’s just what Jesus sent them ... and you ... and me ... to do.

So “pack up the babies and grab the old ladies and everyone goes, ’cause everyone knows ’bout Brother Love’s show.” And please remember – “to reach out your two good hands – reach out to your brother and your sister when they are troubled ... reach out your other hand to God in prayer ... take my hand in yours; walk with me today.”

And let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Alleluia ... Alleluia!

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1. *Matthew (Interpretation series) by Douglas R. A. Hare; Synthesis for June 14, 2020; Neil Diamond’s “Brother Love’s Traveling Salvation Show.”*