

Sunday February 6, 2022
First Lesson: Psalm 138
Gospel Lesson: Luke 5: 1-11
Sermon Series: Volunteer Effect

We are beginning a two week sermon series entitled, “The Volunteer Effect”; a series that will look at what it means to volunteer for the work of the Church. In this series I am hoping to be able to name what this work entails, why this work is necessary and why particularly you and I are essential leaders and collaborators in this work; if we wish to transform our families, communities and world that surrounds us; to become thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

- So where should we start, because I have so much to share with you all this morning;
- Because as many of you know, I just returned from a Justice conference from the DART organization,

which stands for Direct, Action and Research Training;

- And I have to say that this was one of the most invigorating, informative and soul stirring conferences I have ever attended— **to date**; in my ministerial career;
- And this is not because the Conference was in Orlando Florida of all places; although the weather was nice and beautiful; mid 80s in the day and 60s or so in the evening;
- The experience was not even soul stirring because the hotel was attached to a mall either; although I did a little shopping in my spare time as those of you who follow me on Facebook might have noticed;
- What made this conference soul stirring was because it made everything that we do as a Church; every prayer, every act of service, every

sermon, every small group, every story in the Bible....**make sense to me;**

- **There has been an awakening within me** that I did not even know that I needed; as it pertains to what it means to be a leader, teacher, preacher, wife, mother and overall concerned citizen for human rights, environmental rights and conditions and more.
- **There has been an awakening within me** that has even shifted how I was initially going to approach this topic of what it means to be a volunteer;
- For the expected approach that I would suspect many would think a preacher would take, to try and solicit volunteers for the work of the church; is steeped in the scripture Matthew 9:37, that informs the reader that “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;
- In fact these are Jesus’s cited words per Matthew;

- And although I am not here to challenge this statement; for after all Jesus is right in my eyes; there is a lot of work to be done in the Church; with very few workers willing to do so...
- And so the truth of the matter as I see it is that often times, it is the same folk working these committees; sometimes more than one committee; leaving the Church as a whole in a crises;
- For many of these recycled and overused faithful volunteers all across the globe **are tired**;
- Even in our very own Church; First United Methodist Church of Lincoln Ne; I have been told very similar; "I am tired Kirstie..."
- "I have served on the Board of Trustees on and off for 10 years";
- "I have served on the Finance committee for 18 years!"
- "Kirstie this is my third time around serving as the UMW president..."

- “ So I need to take a break, I need to take a rest....someone else needs to take over this role..**because I am tired!**”
- And trust me I get it....this is not to judge anyone; for this is a concerning reality; that recycling the same leaders on various committees; sometimes duplicating and triplicating their duties **is not ideal;**
- Nor does our Methodist polity endorse such a model; hence why there are normally terms of three years according to our Book of Discipline, for people to serve on committees— simply because the Church understands that much needed breaks are needed for people in the ministry of service for a myriad of reasons; **to allow some new leadership** to take on some of these tasks of the church; **to allow new blood** to perhaps pour in a renewed energy, purpose and focus for the mission at hand.

- However according to a book that I am studying and reading for this series entitled “The Volunteer Effect: How your Church can Find, Train and Keep Volunteers who Make a Difference,” by Jason Young and Jonathan Malm; they present some key reasons why volunteers are so difficult to attract and keep.
- The authors note how volunteers seem to have more demands on their time than ever;
- They shared how volunteers don’t always understand the importance of their role;
- They stated how volunteers are inconsistent and communicate poorly and how volunteers have difficulty committing at the level organizations need them;
- They also in this sharing I want you to know, did not let leaders off of the hook in the role that we play in this process.

- For they also shared how leaders have lost touch with what a volunteer's world looks like.
- They stated how leaders underestimate what volunteers are capable of doing.
- They shared how leaders don't give appropriate time and attention to developing their volunteers.
- Finally they shared how leaders see volunteers as a means to getting work done rather than seeing that leaders are positioned to help volunteers to unleash their gifts.
- So this is a very informative yet challenging list for both the volunteer and the leader to swallow;
- Hence why in our upcoming classes that will start next week; as a small group in the class that Dr. Spilker and myself are co-leading together; we will unpack this list and come up with some ways to counteract some of these concerns in detail.
- However, for this time of preaching, my goal for now, is to name the crisis that the Church globally

as a whole are in right now— and see if together we can find a new way forward.

- **And so where our scriptures this morning as I see it comes into play is two fold;**
- Starting off with our first lesson of Psalm 138; if someone were to ask me, “Kirstie, what does it take to be a volunteer in the Church?”—I am seeing the answers embedded in this first lesson of the 138th Psalm.
- For in this psalm, we have an individual similar to you and I, who has made a declaration if I can put it into my own words— that by faith, the psalmist has decided to acknowledge and respond to the sincerity of God’s concern for those in need and felt a call to weigh in on the situation.
- Now in this psalm, we are not told implicitly what God was concerned about; although what I invite us to consider is that the exiled poet was making

such a declaration during a time in which the **holy temple** was in ruins.

- However this reality made little difference for our psalmist because for Jerusalem; this was the city where God had met with God's people.
- The tragedy of the exile had not blotted out the outreach of the Word of God.
- Such a catastrophe as this in fact, would have thoroughly discredited the gods of any other people, and little would have been heard of them anymore.
- However the God of Israel was different and our psalmist understood this.
- For our psalmist is proclaiming God as being the Living God, whose Being does not depend upon whether any particular nation or people exists or not.
- For God was still making God's self known to God's servants among the exiled people, and

revealing God's power in such ways— that the heathen were also realizing— that God was active in human affairs.

- So it is in this acknowledgement ; the psalmist chose to rise to a higher level than many in the Old Testament, and looked with confidence to God for preservation in the **midst of trouble**.
- The psalmist was certain that God would come to his aid when **enemies** attacked him.
- Tribulation was not understood by the psalmist as an indication of God's absence from human life.
- On the contrary, the psalmist was sure that in the midst of his painful reality, God was still at work; to fulfill God's will for his life and thus **perfect, make complete, his life**.

- **So in a nutshell as I step out of our first lesson to attempt to connect the dots of why I am seeing this psalm address the question of what it takes to be a volunteer; I would summarize it as this;**
- **What it takes to be a volunteer** in my eyes is simply someone who recognizes God's concern for those in need and be able to apply it to your own situation;
- **What it takes for someone to be a volunteer** in the church, is for someone to recognize as I have been saying more and more; that just as the problem is in our midst; so is the solution; so the volunteer decides to step up to be a part of the solution...not the problem;
- Because it is easy to criticize what is going on from the sidelines....and you know what I say to those critics; to those who may not be happy with the progress that is going on in the church, or for those

who are not happy with what is going on in our community or in our organization; I would say, you are absolutely correct there are things that need to improve..but you know what...when members of the body of Christ are missing, there will be some missing opportunities; because the Church relies on the whole body to get this work done;

- Ill go back to the scripture I shared last week again..until it clicks...1 Corinthians 12:12-14;
12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves[a] or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many.
- **And this is where I would put my twist on this text...if the foot is missing, then this puts more challenges on the leg; if the hand is missing,**

this puts more strain on the arm; vs 21..The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

- You see as I reflect again on the conference that I just returned from in Orlando regarding justice, the one thing I was struck by, was how candid these leaders were; in naming their understanding of the problem that surrounded them; at the same time naming that they understood that they could play a role in doing something about it.
- **Every time** an individual brought up a concern in their neighborhood or community, they would start off by saying, “Hello my name is so and so **and I am angry** about the lack of clean water in my community,”

- Or “Hello my name is so and so **and I am angry** about the conditions of the recreation centers in my community for children,”
- And then immediately after these individuals named their truth; they went about naming how they were led to organize efforts, resources, education and partnerships with others; to help address said issue they were angry about;
- And I tell you what...these people were effective; once they put their words into action;
- And I know, I know as a church we normally don't like using words like anger..
- But we are called to have righteous anger, when things are simply not right;
- When things are not just;
- When the Gospel is being compromised;
- We ought to be angry...it is necessary to be angry when the people are crying out, and there is no one to come to their aid....

- So these people that I was surrounded by this week had a collective mission to address whatever injustice they were concerned about—they were free to share their anger and it be affirmed;
- And they used that righteous anger to raise awareness, resources and garner collaboration and enough support; to ensure that the issue was reformed.
- Furthermore, what I am impressed about is that our conference of the Great Plains had enough foresight, insight and collected enough resources, to send leaders like myself and 8 others from Lincoln Nebraska; to learn how to do something about some stuff too;
- For this was not a sedentary conference by any means;
- **It was a conference** that was intense;
- **It was a conference** that was intentional;

- **It was a conference** that was rigorous and vigorous in every way; **leaving very little room** for me to catch my breath; **leaving very little time** to catch a moment, because anyone in that room could tell that there was a tremendous **sense of urgency**;
- **There was a sense of urgency** as I recall the gospel of Luke 4 we have been spending some time on these past too Sundays talking and thinking about; because the poor needed to hear some good news; **and the people there in Orlando were concerned....**
- **They were concerned** because the captives have still not been released;
- **They were concerned** because the blind have not recovered their sight;
- **They were concerned** because the oppressed are still not free;

- So these leaders in this room.....mostly all volunteers mind you; traveled from many places because for them...enough was enough;
- For them... it is time to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...
- So once again this experience reminds me that being a volunteer in this work is about being concerned as the Lord is concerned....and being **willing to step up and learn how to do something about it!**
- **Now how I see our gospel of today in Luke 5 this morning fitting into our discussion, is that the gospel then answers the question of “what does a volunteer do in this work I have been naming?”**
- Embedded in our gospel this morning addresses the job requirements so to speak of what the volunteer's work looks like in real time— and that is **we are to catch hold of the people.**

- You see, Luke's account is much more full than the other gospels.
- For in our gospel of Luke, He alone records the miraculous draught of fish, which was Jesus' generous payment for the use of Peter's fishing boat as a pulpit.
- **Two boats** were standing near the shore, while the fishermen washed their nets after a night of fishing.
- Jesus got into one of them, which belonged to Simon Peter, and asked him to pull away from the beach a bit.
- Sitting in the boat the Master was then able to address the crowd that thronged the shore.
- When He had finished His message to the people, Jesus bade Simon push out into the deep water and let down his net. Peter protested that they had **toiled** all night and taken nothing. But he addressed Jesus as *epistata* (**Master**), a term found only in Luke (7 times).

- Immediately the nets enclosed a great school of fish, for which the Lake of Galilee is famous.
- So many were there that their nets **were breaking** (v. 6)—perhaps better “on the point of breaking.”
- Leaving me to reiterate again, that **the work of the volunteer in this story is to catch hold of the people;**
- **To catch hold of the people** who have been omitted and overlooked in the prayer that we pray every week;
- Making my “aha” moment this; I now see why Jesus informed the disciples then which should inform us all now, why the Lord’s Prayer is the only prayer we need to be praying daily found in Luke 11: 1-4;
- ***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those***

who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever Amen;

- **Now I get it First family**..... why Jesus would insist that this is the only prayer we really need —— and that is because this is not a prayer that is **just asking** for mercy...
- This is a prayer that is **asking for JUSTICE**;
- When the prayer says **Give us** this day our daily bread; **and forgive us** our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; **and lead us not into temptation**, but deliver us from evil...
- This prayer my friends and family, are raising issues of justice...
- As I paraphrase this prayer to hopefully make an impact that we will all never forget or be ok with for that matter ever again;

- This prayer is saying **I am angry about** the food insecurity that persists in my community and world that surrounds me...I am angry about all of these hungry children and their families while others eat until their bellies are full... ***give us this day our daily bread;***
- It's saying **I am angry about** the things that people keep doing to other people by way of murder, hatred, discrimination and more... ***forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;***
- It's saying **I am angry at** the role I may even play in some of these issues and concerns that surrounds me; **I am angry that** I have become complacent concerning these issues that surround me; **I am angry that** I have become indifferent and or uninformed or maybe even complicit; **concerning these real urgent issues that surrounds me;**

- For the poor who have been excluded and overlooked from this prayer intentionally or unintentionally....**needs to hear** some good news;
- **The captives need to be** released;
- **The blind needs to** have their sight recovered;
- **The oppressed needs** to be set free;
- *So lead me not into temptation* to keep allowing these things that hinders your kingdom...**that continues to hinder our kingdom** from living out its full potential;
- *Deliver us all from the evils* that keep perpetuating these ideals that are the antithesis of your Word and creative vision oh God...
- For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever, Amen.
- Once we learn how to turn this Lords Prayer from just a place of mercy into a prayer of justice...
- This is when we now we have catches hold of the people.

- Let the Church say Amen and Hallelujah!