

**Gracious Creator, the wonder and beauty of your Creation surrounds us and holds us in its loving embrace. On this morning, when the radiance of your majesty can be seen in the rising of the sun, the gift of your grace and your love for us is a blessing for all who believe. Grant that we may receive your Word and reflect on all You ask us to be. Amen**

**Last week, if you had the occasion to listen to what I was saying about God choosing us and not us choosing God, you may remember and that we, like Simon Peter, and the Apostle Paul, are forgiven our sins and all our guilt has been blotted out. We can receive God's amazing gift, the free gift of salvation for all who believe in the Creator.**

**This week, we have moved from the seaside to the 'plain'.**

**Now, we need a bit of background to this gospel reading for today. After Jesus called the disciples at the seaside, he started teaching his new followers about all they would need in order to be 'fishers of people', something he told them they would soon become. The band of the disciples had been growing almost daily since that seaside experience. By the time we get to today's gospel reading from Luke, chapter 6, verses 17 -26, Jesus has gathered many followers who travel with him almost everyday.**

**In the verses from chapter 6 of Luke's gospel, which precede our gospel reading for today, Jesus has taken his followers off to a high place where they are taught by Jesus. He tells them about God's gift of creation and God's love for all humankind. On that mountain, Luke also tells us in verses 13 to 16, that Jesus selected twelve from among the disciples and called them 'apostles'.**

**As Christians, we think that the word ‘apostle’ belongs firmly within our tradition. In fact, the term ‘apostle’ had been used by the Jewish people for many years before this gospel passage.**

**I checked one source, [The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible](#), for a definition of ‘apostle’, and this is what I discovered. An apostle is one who is commissioned as a messenger or an ambassador. In the Jewish tradition, ordained emissaries of the leaders of the Jewish faith residing in Jerusalem, were sent out to the people who were dispersed throughout the known world. Their mission was to do some preaching, to lead in prayer in the synagogues, but more importantly to collect taxes for the support of the religious leaders back in Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, several figures are seen as being apostle-like to the people of Judaism. Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekial are four such leaders. All were God’s agents. All were given power from the Creator to perform acts on behalf of the Creator. Yet none of these four had any ‘institutional status or title’, as are these Jesus will call as his apostles.**

**Jesus was sent by God, and he in turn is about to send his disciples out to extend his mission, to spread his claim of authority from the Creator, and to advance his mandate to grow the ‘church of God’ throughout all the world.**

**Like the rabbinic apostles from the Jewish faith, Jesus’ followers are sent out to teach, to preach, and to pray. It is here that the similarity between Judaic apostles and Jesus’ followers ends. Jesus’ apostles and his disciples are sent out to teach, to preach, to pray, but also to carry out God’s desire for all humankind to receive the gift of salvation.**

**So, we come to today's gospel. Jesus, the twelve chosen as apostles, and the rest of the band of disciples have descended from the hills to a flat area called the plain. Jesus has come down to fulfill his mission to help the poor, the lonely, the sick, the grieving, and the oppressed. In all likelihood, the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew's gospel are one in the same event. In both gospels, the writers have probably taken a collection of Jesus' teachings, gathered from a variety of settings and events, and cobbled these together into one event.**

**The sermon on the plain takes place after Jesus is reported to have done many miracles and healings. Jesus has called Matthew the tax-collector, has attended several gatherings and meals with even more tax-collectors, has communed with gentiles, has failed to reign in his own followers who have broken the rules set down by the religious leaders around not working on the Sabbath, and has even he himself broken the rules by performing healings on the Sabbath day.**

**Now, in this passage, many are present to hear Jesus and to be healed. We are told that a great multitude of people from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coastal areas of the regions of Tyre and Sidon, along with many Jews, Gentiles and others were there to hear Jesus and to be healed of their afflictions. Many sought to touch his robe believing that in doing so, they would be healed.**

**In Luke's gospel, many of these events leading up to the Sermon on the Plain are labelled as what we call 'conflict stories'. These stories provide the backdrop for today's passage from Luke. In almost all of these conflicts, Jesus finds himself up against the pharisees and the scribes because they have taken offense with Jesus for violating**

**religious norms they believe must be followed. Jews were supposed to be Godly, more so than any of the Gentile peoples could ever be. They were to uphold the moral fabric Sabbath observance; and to be complacent before the authority of the Jewish religious leaders.**

**Now, along comes this Jesus person who is offering the common people, and us, a new way. This new way is counter to what the religious leaders of the day, believe is God's desire of them. They are not pleased with what Jesus is offering.**

**Jesus offers the crowd teachings which were meant to challenge their belief of who are blessed before the Creator. Jesus gives the crowds this list of blessings, and a list of woes. These blessings and woes are descriptive pronouncements of who has honour before God and who have already received their reward in this temporal existence.**

**Jesus presents these new realities as being the complete reversal of what people had been experiencing in their lives.**

**Now, there is a lesson for us as God's people in these uncertain times that we find ourselves. Our mission is like that of the apostles and the disciples. We are to go out from this place of worship to share the Good News about God's gift of salvation for all peoples. We have been given grace, skills, and talents to be shared with all creation. We are to model our actions on Jesus' example. Of course, that means that we must first acknowledge that humankind needs our attention, all humankind and not just those we chose to see as being worthy of our presence, but every person needing food, clothing, shelter, physical and/or mental support, relief from any natural or human-caused disasters, lack of educational opportunities, gender inequalities, or faith. That is what Jesus taught us to do.**

**It seems to me that there are many opportunities for us to do God's work right here on salt spring Island. Why are we so slow to respond to the Spirit's leading in our lives?**

**As we leave this service of worship, today, we will hear words which are not a dismissal, but rather as call to commission. Listen to what these words are saying to us.**

**"Go forth into world to love and serve the Lord." There you have it. We are not being dismissed. We are being given the same mission Jesus gave to his own apostles, disciples, and to all humanity, to care for all humankind. So I leave you today with one last thought – we go forth today from this service worship and we move directly into the work of holding our annual general meeting. That's our task for today. So, I invite you to get a coffee and a snack from in the upper parish hall, and to come back into the nave for our AGM. God is asking us to share who we are, what we have, and to do what God is asking us to do for all humankind. That's our mission!**

**Are you ready for this mission? With God's help, I believe we are.**

**Amen**