

Jesus Is Sending Us Out!

by Rev. Durrell Watkins

Lent 5, 2008

Matthew 10.16-20

Imagine a woman born about 1820 in Maryland . She is born into slavery, the daughter of slaves. As a child she is severely beaten by her oppressors, and once even sustains a serious head injury when a cruel overseer lashes out at her.

Imagine this same woman in 1845 at the young age of 25 deciding that she will risk her life in search of freedom. Imagine her making it as far as Pennsylvania , and after learning about the workings of the Underground Railroad, joining the effort to help slaves escape to Canada .

Now free, imagine this remarkable woman returning to Maryland at great personal risk to help first her family escape from slavery. At age 31, she helped her family escape to Canada , which would be her new home for about 6 years. Imagine her not being content to help only herself or her family, but continuing to help upwards of 300 people escape from bondage to the hope of freedom.

When the Civil War broke out, imagine this great hero volunteering to serve in the military as a guide, a nurse, and a spy.

The Civil War concludes. Slavery is over. Does our hero rest on her accomplishments, content to tell stories of her brave exploits in the past? Of course not! Now imagine this amazing woman working for women's suffrage, and building a home for the aged and indigent. Of course the woman we are imagining is none other than Harriet Tubman, an American hero and an example of progressive, positive, practical Christian values.

Harriet Tubman could have accepted her lot in life, but instead, she worked for her own liberation.

Harriet Tubman could have embraced her emancipation and forgotten about others who didn't make it to the promised land. Instead, she risked her safety, her liberty, and her life to help one more person and then one more and then one more until hundreds of people were able to join her in the experience of freedom.

Harriet Tubman could have decided that she had already fought the good fight and turn it over to others in her middle years. Instead, she continued to fight for freedom as a volunteer in the Civil War.

Once the war was over, Harriet Tubman could have declared victory and enjoyed a simple retirement; instead, she continued to serve others by fighting for women's rights and providing comfort to people in need. Harriet Tubman joined the eternal cloud of witnesses at her death in 1913. She was buried with military honors.

Harriet Tubman gave her life to serving others. She didn't do it for honors or rewards. She didn't do it for titles or recognition. She didn't do it for social standing or to be remembered in history books. She didn't do it to create a legend or a legacy. She did it because as a devout Methodist, she believed God wanted her to do it. She believed it was her calling to do unto others as she would have them do unto her. She believed that to whom much is given, much is required. And even in her most humble circumstances, she realized she had gifts, and gifts are to be shared.

Harriet Tubman chose to believe in herself, and by living a life committed to liberty and justice for ALL, she helped others believe in themselves. And when a person believes in herself or himself, that person is able to discover the presence of God within herself or himself; and in God's presence, life is enriched, ennobled, and enlightened.

Harriet Tubman allowed herself to be the love of God in action; she allowed herself to share the light with the world because she knew...as a follower of Jesus and as a believer in the God she encountered in the life of Jesus, she knew that following Jesus was costly, and it entailed selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege. She knew it, and she lived it. And there is not one scrap of evidence that she ever regretted it.

You see, it isn't the cost of achievement that one regrets. It isn't what we tried to do, whether we succeeded or not, that brings us dismay. It is what we didn't do that we find so vexing. The price was high, but never too high; because the price for answering the call to follow Jesus in bringing hope and liberation to one's neighbor is high, but never too high. It is just high enough so that when we pay the price we feel like we got something truly significant in return.

Harriet Tubman knew what Jesus and his earliest followers knew: you can't out give God. The more we give to the cause of liberty for all, the more we give to the cause of justice for all, the more we give to the cause of bringing hope and healing to every person, the more we give, the more we receive. We start to encounter God in our very hearts. We start to see that our lives have sacred value and that the love we share makes a difference. The more we give, the more like Jesus we become.

Jesus said, "I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves." Jesus knew there were predators out there who thrive on tearing people apart and keeping them down...there are people who hate or fear their neighbors because of their race or language or religion or gender identity or sexual orientation. There are haters out there...in homes and in schools and in Congress and in mayor's offices and in pulpits.

But Jesus said, "I'm sending you out..." You have to confront injustice, so be wise, be careful, be aware, but be about making a difference. It's not easy, and it may not pay much. It may not get you an award or your picture in the paper or your name on a street sign, but when you do what is right... when you help someone up, when you stand up for equal opportunity, when you speak up for the disenfranchised, when you speak out against injustice and when you reach out to the marginalized, then you are rewarded with the feeling of significance, the feeling of accomplishment, the feeling of knowing that at least on occasion, you are the light of the world.

When you allow yourself to be the light and love of God in this world, you are also the voice of God. Spirit is speaking through you and what She is saying is that God doesn't have one person to waste. Jesus says to us today: Behold, I am sending you out...to continue Sharing the Light with the World. This is the Good News! Amen.

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*I am an agent of divine peace.
I am an agent of divine hope.
I am an agent of divine healing.
I am the love of God in action.
I am sharing the Light with the world.
And as I let my light shine...
My life is richly blessed.
And so it is!*

**The final word comes from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:
*Knowing is not enough; we must apply.
Willing is not enough; we must do.***