

Let me ask you...

Have you ever gotten a job you *didn't* ask for...

didn't feel *ready* for...

and *honestly*... weren't even sure if you wanted it?

Maybe it was a promotion that came with a mountain of headaches.

Maybe someone handed you a crying baby at a family reunion...

and then just walking away.

Or *maybe... maybe... it was God...*

And that's the *biggest* plot twist of them all.

Well... Welcome to the Bible!

Because today... in every single one of our readings

God is handing people a job!

And the *stunning* thing...

The thing that can make us sit up a little straighter...

is that God is also giving that job... to *us*.

Look at our first reading... from Exodus 19.

The Israelites have barely caught their breath
after crossing the Red Sea.

They're camped at the foot of Mount Sinai...

Sunburned... Tired...

Arguing about who forgot to pack enough water.

When God called Moses up the mountain:

You've seen what I did to Egypt.

I carried you on eagles' wings.

And now... if you obey my voice...

You shall be my treasured possession...

out of all the peoples."

Treasured possession.

I want you to hear that.

You know how some folks have a special place...
A place where they keep what matters most to them...
Old photos... Grandma's vase...
A little trinket from back home
that no one else could possibly understand
but ***you know... exactly...*** what it means.

That's what God is saying.
You are in my special place.

Many of us know something about being uprooted
about leaving an island
leaving a homeland
coming to a new place and wondering if you belong.

God said to the Israelites... what God says to us today...
You have not been abandoned.
You have been carried.
On eagles' wings.

What does God ask of us in return?

Obedience and a relationship.

Not perfection.

Not a spotless record.

Just: Stay close. Listen. Walk with me.

This ***is*** the deal... the ***covenant...***

but ***less*** like a ***contract...*** and ***more...*** like ***a marriage***

Built on ***trust...*** Built on ***love...*** Built on ***showing up.***

And then... the psalmist *gives us* our response.
Psalm 100 is not a quiet... polite little psalm.

This is not the psalm of someone who wandered into church...
Sat *away* from everybody... hoping *nobody* noticed.

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.”

All the earth.

Not just the people who *feel* like it.
Not just the people who have *good voices*.

All. The. Earth.

Now... in this congregation... I’m not too worried about that.
I’ve heard you sing. I’ve heard you clap.
I have seen what praise looks like here
and it is **magnificent**.

You pour out bring your whole selves.
Maybe that’s something from back home
the way worship in the Caribbean never seemed afraid to be loud,
never seemed embarrassed to be full.

The enthusiasm... the passion... the “amens”

The Psalm also says:

“Know that the Lord is God.

***It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”***

Not “*we used to be his.*”

Not “*we might be his if we behave.*”

We **ARE** his.

Present tense. ***Permanent. Unshakeable.***

Some of us *need* to hear that today.
You are *not on probation* with God.
You are *not being auditioned*.
You *belong...* to the one... *who made you...*
and that doesn't change...
depending on how your week went.

Then in today's Epistle
Paul says something shocking in Romans 5.
"While we were still sinners... Christ died for us."

Not ***"after we cleaned up our acts."***
Not ***"once we figured out how to behave."***
While we were still a hot mess...
Still stumbling around in the dark...

Think about *that*
the next time you think you have to
earn your way into God's heart.
God didn't wait for you to be *impressive*.
God ***came to you...*** in the *middle* of your *unimpressiveness*
and said... **I choose you anyway.**

Paul also says...
We boast in our sufferings.
Say what? He's kidding right?
Boast in our sufferings?
Father Rob...
I do *not* come to church...
to *celebrate* my problems.

But Paul's **logic** is *both beautiful... and extraordinary*
*Suffering... produces **endurance**.*
*Endurance... produces **character**.*
*Character produces **hope**.*

It's like he's said:

The difficult road you've walked has not been wasted.
God has been forming something in you
something real... something deep...
through every hard season you've survived.

There are people in this room
who came to this country with two suitcases and a prayer.
Who rebuilt their lives from scratch.
Who raised children in a foreign culture
while holding on to their faith
and their identity
and their grandmother's recipes.

That... is *endurance*.

That... is *character*.

That... is *hope*.

And then we get to Matthew's gospel reading...
and things get *very practical*.
Jesus went through *all the cities and villages...*
Teaching... Proclaiming... Healing...

As he looked at the crowds... He *felt* something. *Felt...* something.

*“He had compassion for them,
because they were harassed and helpless,
like sheep without a shepherd.”*

That word: **compassion.**

In the Greek, it's *splag-chin-zo-mai*

It means... *to be moved in your gut.*

Not a polite feeling.

Not a distant sympathy.

A visceral... aching... whole-body response...

to someone else's pain.

Jesus looks at the world... and it **hurts** him.

Not in a way that *paralyzes* him...

But in a way that *moves* him... *to action.*

He turns to his disciples and says:

The harvest is plentiful. The workers are few.

Ask the Lord to send workers into the harvest.

And then... before anything else happened...

He commissioned the twelve.

He gave them authority.

He sent them out.

Here is what I find wonderfully amusing about this moment:
Jesus tells them.... *pray for workers...*

Then *immediately* makes *them...*
The *answer... to their own prayer.*

Be careful what you pray for...
God has a tendency to say...
Great idea. You go first.

Now...
Jesus didn't send these twelve out with a marketing strategy
They didn't have a big budget.
Nope!
He said:
Take no gold. No silver. No extra tunic. No staff.
Travel light.

Now *our* problem... *and I include myself in this...*
is... We want to *wait* until *we're sure* we're... **ready.**
So... we do *nothing...* *until we get...*
enough money. *enough* education.
enough confidence. *enough* time.

We tell ourselves:
Once I have enough... I'll serve.
Once things are more stable... I'll give.
Once I know what I'm doing... *then...* I'll step up.

There's s song in movie... *The Greatest Showman*

*All the shine of a thousand spotlights
All the stars we steal from the night sky
Will never be enough
Never be enough*

*Towers of gold are still too little
These hands could hold the world but it'll
Never be enough
Never be enough*

But that's *not* what Jesus says:
He says... go *now!*

What you have... is *enough...* because *I... am enough.*
The same one who heals the sick
and raises the dead
is the one sending you.

You don't have to carry everything.
You just have to carry... yourself... faithfully... one step at a time.

And yes, There's a caveat...
Jesus warns us:
It won't always be easy.
Some doors will close.
Some people won't listen.
You'll be like sheep among wolves.

This is *not prosperity* gospel
Jesus is *honest* about *the cost.*

But in the very same breath, he says:

***Do not worry about how you are to speak
or what you are to say;
for what you are to say will be given to you at that time;
for it is not you who speak,
but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”***

The *Spirit* speaks *through* you.

Through *you*.

With *your* accent.

With *your* history.

With *your* **particular... irreplaceable... God-given self.**

You are Sent... You are loved... That is Enough

So let me tie these passage together.

What *is* God saying... to *us... today?*

From Exodus:

You have been carried. You are treasured. You belong to God.

From the Psalm:

Respond with joy. Enter with thanksgiving.
God's steadfast love endures forever.

From Romans:

You are loved...
...not because you've earned it
But because God is like that.
Extravagant.
Unstoppable.
For you... even in your mess.

From Matthew:

You are sent.
The harvest is all around you...
in your neighborhood... at your job... in your family

And you have been given *authority*...
and *presence*...
and... *the Spirit of God*...

TO GO!

Back in 1999 the praise band 4 Him released a song called
The Only Thing I Need I Already Have.
It still gives me chill when I hear it.
I played it in my car on my way here today.

Eyes closed in a veil of tears when I hear the sound
Once more you've come to me - You've calmed me down
You still the raging sea inside of me
My Lord has come for me
Why-why is it so hard for me to see
Why is it so hard to just believe
Show me what it means to be free

The only thing I need I already have
The fullness of Your mercy in my hand
The only One who loves me as I am
The only thing I need I already have

My heart - a companion to my wounded soul
Again You comfort me-You take control
You quell the fear that owns too much of me
As it was meant to be

So why-when each and every word becomes a war
When there's nothing I can see worth fighting for
You come into my heart and set me free

The only thing I need I already have
The fullness of Your mercy in my hand
The only One who loves me as I am
The only thing I need I already have

A few years ago... there was a study... that asked people...
What's your biggest regret in life.

The number-one answer?
across all cultures... and ages... and background...
It wasn't...

"I wish I'd done less."

The answer was:
"I wish I'd been braver."

I wish I'd reached out.
I wish I'd stepped forward.
I wish I'd said the kind thing,
the hard thing,
the true thing.

We are not called to a life of spectacular heroics.
We are called to a life of faithful presence.
To show up...
in the hospital room...
at the grocery store...
in the conversation with a neighbor...

To be the hands of Jesus...
in the small, ordinary, unglamorous moments
that turn out to be anything but ordinary.

In a few moments... we'll pray for Love Wisdom and Courage

Creator God, by the mercies of your son, our Lord, Jesus,
compel us to turn our hearts
to his Way of Love, Wisdom and Courage,
that we might follow Jesus together as your faithful people,
as we pause, listen, and respond in prayer, saying:
Jesus, guide us in your way of Love, Wisdom and Courage

Look around the church.
Look at the person beside you.
This congregation...
with all its *history*... its *music*...
Its *laughter*... its *sorrow*... its *feast* after the service...

Its grandmothers *in hats*... and grand-*children* at the altar
This congregation... is a sign... **of God's kingdom.**

You didn't end up here by accident.
God *carried* you right here... on *eagles'* wings...
Some of you... literally... across an ocean...
and planted you... here... in this place... for such a time as this.

The harvest around us is plentiful.
And yes... the workers are few.

And now... today... as it was for the twelve...
Jesus looks at you with *compassion*... and with *confidence*
and says:

Go!

You are sent!

You are loved!

You are enough.

And the people say... Amen.