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Since Jesus strikes me as one of the most inclusive and all-embracing people who has ever lived, it surprises me at first that he would tell his disciples to steer clear of the Gentiles when they go out to proclaim the kingdom and cure people's diseases. And stay away from Samaritans, too, he said. "Go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." At the end, he'll send them out to all nations; but at first, mysteriously, it's only to the Jews. Avoid other needy people, he tells them.

Don't go all over the world, first just go to your own people, to the Jews.

I know I tell this story too often, but some stories need to be told time and again. When Mother Teresa visited Charlotte, NC years ago, it was a real God moment. She spoke in the huge Charlotte Coliseum, and the place was packed. There were huge traffic jams to get to the Coliseum that day, and parking was a bear for miles. In retrospect, it seems just like God to use a tiny, elderly woman who had taken a vow of poverty, a woman whose life was devoted to the poorest and least powerful in the world, dying homeless people in Calcutta,...it's just like God to use this tiny, mustard seed of a poor woman to bring one of the banking capitals in the world almost to a complete standstill.

And when the time came for her to speak, Mother Teresa was ushered to the stage in the center of the coliseum, people shoulder to shoulder and floor to ceiling all around this diminutive, stooped over lady in her habit. And a central part of her message was this. "Don't come to Calcutta," she said. "Go home. Go home and love the people you find there. Go to your own families and friends, your spouses and children and mothers and fathers, and love them. Love the people at your grocery store; love the people at your offices and in your neighborhoods.

"But don't come to Calcutta," she said. "You have plenty to do right here." Later, Mother Teresa would remark about her visit to the United States that she had never encountered such spiritual poverty, as she had here in the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

I don't think Mother Teresa was saying we should never go to the poor overseas. We have so much to learn from the poor about true spiritual riches, and about our own poverty. I think she was just saying, first, don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans. First go to your own people and learn about love. Later, you can come to Calcutta.

When Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful, maybe he is talking about the harvest in our own backyard, in our everyday life. Increasingly, I have a sense that I don't have to go very far at all to find plenty of important ministry. That doesn't diminish the importance of our caring for the children of God in other parts of the world, but deep down I think I know what Jesus is teaching here.

That is, it's sometimes easier to imagine loving people I don't know halfway around the world than it is to imagine loving certain people in my everyday life, Because people at home, well, they can be so difficult, ... so ungrateful, ... so distant,.... They don't understand me.

Sometimes, I'd rather go overseas and love people there, in part because I can take them something. I can make their lives better by bringing some of my stuff to give them. But at home, the people there don't get as excited about my bringing them things. Cherry has needed a new car for a while now, but if I went out and bought her a car this afternoon, I'd be in the doghouse tonight. People at home aren't interested in stuff we can bring them. They're just interested in whether or not we really care about them, whether we truly love and honor them for who they are.

I think this is why Jesus tells his disciples not to take any stuff with them – no gold or silver or copper, no bag, don't take two tunics or sandals. Because you have within yourself the power and authority to heal the people in your life. It's within you, so don't take anything else, because it would only be a distraction. What the people in your life need is not your stuff; what they need is what I'm telling you everyone already has. The kingdom is within you.

I think this is what St. Paul means in the epistle this morning when he says, "the love of God has been poured into your hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to you." We have more power than we can imagine. We don't need anything.

Our missionaries in Argentina, Monica Vega and Heidi Schmidt, are currently working with deeply impoverished and abused women. Last week, they took these women on retreat, to give them some rest and to help them recover a sense of their own dignity, worth, and beauty. On Friday, Heidi wrote, "In our women's group yesterday we asked them to share one light in their lives. And there were a few (so battered by such hard lives) who couldn't come up with even one; they really struggled just in thinking. And the other women immediately jumped in to share all the light they could see in that person – shining the light from without, until the struggling ones could reach their own light within." We can do this for each other. It's why we're here.

The Kingdom is within you. As the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas says, what you bring forth from within you will save you. The problem is that we are too often looking outside ourselves for what we believe will save us – more money, more status, a new job, a new president or a new FBI director, a more fair and balanced media. But the Gospel repeatedly affirms, nothing outside you will heal you or give you peace of mind in any lasting way.

I remember reading a story about one of the early popes. After so many generations of poverty and the persecution of Christians, this pope was showing one of his clergy the many treasures of the Vatican. And finally, the pope turned to his priest and with some satisfaction said, "No longer will the Church have to say, 'Gold and silver have I none.'" And the priest responded, "Yes, your Holiness, and no longer can the Church say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.'"

Are we losing touch with what God has put within us? The truth is that we all have enormous Godly power, but all too often we are distracted by our fascination with lesser things. C.S. Lewis says we're like children who have been offered an incredible holiday at the sea, but we insist on playing in a mud puddle instead. We have the value of things all wrong – we think what is outside us is more valuable than what is within us.

One reason Jesus tells us first of all to go love the people at home, is that the people there aren't impressed with our "stuff" or anything we can bring them. What the people in our lives need is what the battered women in Monica and Heidi's program need – they just need to believe that someone sees the light and life in them, their beauty, their love. Let your light shine, Jesus says, so that others can find their own. Don't take anything with you. It's you they need; just let your light shine.

Sometimes when we're going to see a friend in the hospital, we feel better if we can take something with us, like a vase of flowers, maybe, or some balloons. (Hospitals have figured this out, because hospitals everywhere now sell flowers and balloons in their lobbies.) Or when we call on a friend who is grieving, sometimes it seems so much easier if we can take a casserole with us. Don't get me wrong – tokens of love and affection like these are good. In fact, I've benefited from them myself, and I can testify to the healing power of our own parishioners' cooking and my neighbor's scotch.

But the danger can be that we'll focus more on the token than on the power of the love that the token represents.

So, every now and then, we need to call on each other with nothing but our life and love for the person. No gold or silver or copper, no flowers or balloons or casseroles, just the good news of the kingdom of God that we can express in the simplest words – "I love you." "I'm praying for you." And often, God's healing power is revealed best when our words simply become flesh, in the form of a touch or embrace.

Parker Palmer tells about his own dark battle with clinical depression. So many well-meaning friends stopped in on him, he said, and did their best to offer healing words. They would say things like, "It's a beautiful day outside, why don't you get out there and soak up some sunshine, it'll do you good." Or another would say, "Parker, you are such a good person. You've helped so many. Try to think of all the good you've done." And others would begin by saying, "I know exactly how you feel," after which he did not hear anything else, because that could not possibly be true.

Often Parker simply felt even more disconnected after such visits. But there was one man who came by to see Parker every afternoon, after asking for permission. He would sit Parker in a chair, kneel in front of him, remove his shoes and socks, and simply massage his feet for half an hour. And if this friend spoke at all, he would only say, "I sense your struggle today," or, "You feel a little stronger today." Parker Palmer says he felt as if this loving man saw him, really saw him as he was, and in the process validated his struggle.

As Jesus sends the twelve this morning, so he sends us. Our challenge, perhaps, is to recognize the amazing gift each of us already has within us – the power to heal and even to bring each other back to life. All that we need for the journey of our lives and our relationships has already been poured into our hearts. Nothing outside us can save us. The kingdom of God is within us. Often our role is to let our light shine, so that others can find the light in themselves. We can do this for each other. It's why we're here.