

“It’s all Greek to me,” is a familiar phrase, usually expressing incomprehension. When it comes to biblical analysis, “It’s all Greek to me,” is the truth. The earliest texts that we have of the Bible are written in koine--or common--Greek. Thus, you can imagine all of the possible translations that exist, as people try to understand exactly how to interpret each Greek term. One recent and fresh translation is Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*. Peterson seeks to capture the spirit of the text rather than precisely translating each word. The result is interesting, particularly when reflecting on the gospel for today. His translation reads:

Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. "What a huge harvest!" he said to his disciples. "How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!"

The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. . . Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge:

"Don't begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don't try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.

Slight nuances, but you get the sense of a lively teaching, involvement of others in tenderly caring for bruised and hurt lives, and the wonderful phrase near the end of the lesson, “Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here.” Go in the neighborhood. The kingdom is here. Right here in the neighborhood. Not halfway around the world, but right here. Not at the end of this life, but right now. Not in the palaces that amaze, but in the environment we know so well, the neighborhood. Not in the principalities that control, but in the common hands whom Jesus calls out. Right here. Right now. In the neighborhood. God’s will is done and, surprisingly, the kingdom makes its home among us in this very way. Thus, perhaps, part of what we are called to is to look around for God’s work right here. Right now. And with the most unlikely characters. You and me!

Which may not necessarily be our first instinct. There are so many things in life that are brighter, more attractive, and seemingly more important. God, we often mistake, must reside there. Yet, if today’s text is any indication, the ways of the world are not the ways of God. Thus, almost two millennia before Margaret Meads famous dictum, “Never doubt that a small

group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." we have Jesus proving the point, calling out 12 individuals who do just that. Though, at first glance, you might wonder about the "thoughtfulness" and "committed" nature of the individuals who Jesus chooses to declare that the kingdom is here. We know their names, but rarely do we consider their backgrounds. Some were fishermen, the dregs of society. Matthew was a tax collector in cahoots with the oppressive Roman occupiers, Simon the Canaanite was a zealot seeking the overthrow of Rome, Peter denied knowing Jesus in the midst of his darkest hour, and Judas betrayed Jesus into his death. When we hear Meads affirmation of the power of a few people to make change in the world, I suspect that we more often have the image of an eagle scout or a class valedictorian than a ragtag bunch of misfits like those whom Jesus chooses.

Yet, the point is that God can make do with any number or type of person. Indeed, it is not the strong, powerful, and positioned who are the movers and shakers in proclaiming the kingdom is here, bringing health to sick, raising the dead, touching the untouchables, and kicking out demons. It is the normal, everyday, common followers around Jesus. If God can do it with the motley crew around him in today's gospel, well, then God can certainly do the same with you and with me.

Which is a powerful point of the text and a sobering one. As Colin Yuckman rightly notes, "To be sent by Jesus is, in some sense, to be sent *as* Jesus." Blasphemy! Some might snort. Arrogance! Others would proclaim. However, a key understanding to this text is that Jesus does not claim the mantle of Savior for himself only. Rather, he invites others into this work. He welcomes those who are marginalized to meet others dismissed by the larger world. And in so doing a bit of the sacred nature found in Jesus finds expression in those who are sent out by him. This work and the presence of the divine is not bound by time either. Again, it happens here and now. The kingdom keeps popping up before our very eyes.

Thus, we do well to recognize that Jesus calls us also. And one of the reasons we are not always open to accept the call is that it forces us to look within. And looking within forces us to see what we don't like to see. Particularly, if the work we are called to is to, "tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives." Invariably, we come face to face with the bruises and hurts in our own lives as well. For in such recognition or awareness of our own brokenness, we understand our connection to others in their brokenness. Bryan Stevenson insightfully notes, "There is a strength, a power even, in understanding brokenness, because embracing our brokenness creates a need and desire for mercy and perhaps a corresponding need to show mercy. When you experience mercy, you learn things that are hard to learn otherwise. You see things you can't otherwise see; you hear things you can't otherwise hear. You begin to recognize the humanity that resides in each of us." Which is a pretty important thing to recognize: the humanity that resides in each of us.

Particularly in this time of Black Lives Matter. We can say that all lives matter, and this is true. However, the reason Black Lives Matter is because of the systemic and institutionalized mistreatment of a people based solely on the color of their skin. In ways that we cannot often even understand, we fail to recognize the humanity that resides in our African-American brothers and sisters and perpetuate the ongoing discrimination and disenfranchisement of an entire race by action and inaction, through privilege and power, amidst structures that we cannot even see, yet nevertheless marginalize others. Thus, this call that Jesus gives is one that possesses poignancy and import right here and right now, particularly if we desire to work with God to usher in the kingdom.

It is important to note that Jesus does not usher in the kingdom from on high, in power and glory. Rather Jesus ushers in the kingdom from below, through the all-too-human followers that are sent out. It is a reminder to us that it is not the best and brightest, the wealthiest and well-connected, nor the powerful and the positioned who secure God's kingdom. If they did, there would, perhaps, be no need for God. For these are self-sufficient. Rather, as Paul says later to the community in Corinth, "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Indeed. This place of marginalization or vulnerability may not be the place that we want to occupy. Yet, it is the place that we will brush elbows with countless times throughout our life. Aware of this, and open to God calling us into those places and meeting us there, we may be surprised where and when we see God, or we may be surprised where the kingdom emerges. Regardless, the invitation is given to us all--as it was to those initial twelve--to strive to model Jesus' example, to look beyond actions to need, to see the pain and hurt and unheard laments, to view those around us not in fear but with compassion. And when we do, the kingdom grows a little bigger, a little fuller and occupies a bit more of the neighborhood.