Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 60: entering the harvest

What gift(s) do you have?

Day 413. The Harvest Field

(Jesus sent out these 12), instructing them as follows: "Do not go on a road that leads to Gentile regions and do not enter any Samaritan town. Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Do not take gold, silver, or copper in your belts; no bag for the journey; or an extra tunic or sandals or staff; for the worker deserves his provisions. Whenever you enter a town or village, find out who is worthy there and stay with them until you leave. As you enter the house, greet those within it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your message, shake the dust off your feet as you leave that house or that town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town!" (Matthew 10:5-15)

Jesus sent His twelve closest disciples out on a road trip, with very specific instructions:

1.) Go only to those I send you to.
2.) Preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is near
3.) Do wondrous acts of healing and restoration
4.) Do not take anything in return
5.) Let those you are with support your needs
6.) Give your peace, receive your peace, if you are not accepted, shake the dust off and move on.

Let's look at those this week.

1.) Go only to those I send you to.

On this foray, Jesus' disciples were sent to the people of Israel. Only after Peter received a vision from God (Acts 10:9-16) do the disciples broaden their ministry to intentionally include the Gentiles (though Luke does record specific disciples being sent to non-Jews before that, such as Acts 8:4-40, with the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch).

Jesus mentioned that He Himself was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Many people are sent to people they are familiar with, while a few are sent to strange lands and strange peoples. Most are sent to those who are around them – family, friend, and stranger. In all cases, it is important to discern what field God is asking you to harvest in.

How will I know?

1st, talk to God about it. Pray. Converse with Jesus and ask Him to send you someone either from the field He has chosen you to harvest in, or a guide to lead you to them.

In Chapter XII of the Rule of the Franciscans, it states, "Let those brothers who wish by divine inspiration to go among the Saracens (Muslims) or other non-believers ask permission to go from their Provincial Ministers. The ministers, however, may not grant permission except to those whom they see fit to be sent."

Which leads to
2nd, if you feel you are called to a field outside your parish, get the permission of your local incumbent. If you feel you are called to a field outside your diocese, then approach your diocesan bishop. They shall pray and either agree and bless your mission or ask you to go back to the 1st step.

And
3rd, use the gifts God has given you to match the needs of those where you have been led. If you have the gift of preaching (many people do not), preach to them. If you have the gift of healing, heal. If you have the gift of encouragement, encourage. Feed into their scarcity where God has given you abundance. If you do not find a match between the gifts God has created in you and the needs of the people, then go back to step one and try again.

Describe your harvest field. Now, label the gifts God has given you, that you can use for the needs of those in your field. How do you think you should proceed?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 414: Preach that the Kingdom of Heaven is near

Before you say anything, I don't have the gift of preaching.

You don't?

You're about to tell me to preach that the Kingdom of God is near – I don't have the gift of preaching. I know I don't.

I'm glad you recognize this! In the unconfirmed first rule he made for his order of monks (1209-1221), it is thought that St. Francis of Assisi included:

No brother may preach contrary to the forms and institutions of the holy church and unless it has been conceded to him by his minister. The minister must beware not to grant this concession to anyone indiscriminately. All the brothers, however, should preach by their actions. And no minister or preacher should appropriate to himself the ministry to the brothers or the office of preaching, but at whatever hour he is enjoined to do so he should give up his office without any objection. (https://www.capdox.capuchin.org.au/legislation/the-unconfirmed-first-rule-of-st-francis/).

So, if you think you have the gift of preaching,

a.) Make sure you preach what the church has taught through the centuries,
b.) Your actions should reinforce and inform your words – in fact, your actions should clearly share the Gospel, even if your words do not, and
c.) Preaching is not a self-appointed ministry, but one which is appointed to you by the church at large

In the official rule (published A.D. 1223) that the Franciscans still use today, it is written:

[Chapter IX]
1 The brothers may not preach in the diocese of any bishop when he has opposed their doing so.
2 And let none of the brothers dare to preach in any way to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the General Minister of this fraternity and the office of preacher has been conferred upon him.
3 Moreover, I admonish and exhort those brothers that when they preach their language be well-considered and chaste for the benefit and edification of the people, announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity, because our Lord when on earth kept His word brief.

In other words,

a.) Get the permission of the diocesan bishop,
b.) Have your preaching confirmed by your local group (church or order)
c.) Speak to the people so they understand, and keep it brief.

Even if you do not have the gift of preaching verbally, remember this: "*All the brothers should preach by their actions."* Have your life, your words and deeds, communicate the good news

that the risen and ascended Jesus is with you and you are near His reign in shalom. Let your trust of your loving heavenly Father show through. That in itself is often a most effective way of preaching.

If you feel you have the gift of preaching that the Kingdom of God is near, ask for confirmation from your local parish. Regardless, please describe how your life, your daily actions and words, is demonstrating the good news that the Kingdom is near.

Share how you demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is near, with some you trust.

Day 415: Gifts

"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons."

Ok, you can stop there.

Stopped.

I have never healed, or raised, or cleansed, or cast out. This is la-la land for me.

Not that you know of.

I am certain.

This may not be your gift then. If you feel you have this gift, it may be one of the hardest ones.

Why do you say that?

Because it takes great risk. It takes great vulnerability. If you say to someone "you are healed in Jesus' name," and they are not healed …

You look like a fool.

Exactly. And while God may not worry about it too much, not many people are happy to look like fools. Also, there have been many instances recorded where people thought they had this gift, proclaimed healing, and the person not only wasn't healed, but got worse.

Which does not help spread good news that the Kingdom of God is available.

Definitely not. If anything, it can create doubt or even mockery. This is true of any gift – preaching, healing, anything. For any gift, it is very important that:

a.) the community at large agrees that you have this gift
b.) you get the bishop's permission, on behalf of the wider church
c.) you are willing to take risks and use the gift – not for flash, not for fame or fortune, not for your own ego, but genuinely for the health and saving of those involved. As Jesus frequently demonstrated, usually the quieter and more humble you can make the event, the better it is for everyone. Often, it will require you to risk and be vulnerable.

I won't seek this then. I really do not think I have it.

One more thing…

What's that?

Just because you don't officially have a gift doesn't mean that God won't decide to use you in that way. For example, you may not have the gift of healing, but you may witness people getting healed.

Can you give me some examples?

An easy one is, what if you work in a hospital as a janitor an administrator, or anything other than a direct health provider (like a doctor or a nurse)? You will hopefully be surrounded by healing every day – healing that you contribute to by keeping the place clean, or administrating patient records effectively, for example.

Another example is if someone comes to you in distress, and you purposefully and intently listen to them and pray for them (out loud or silently). Though you haven't "done" anything, you may find that people have relationships healed, emotions healed, even experience spiritual healing through the process of you listening to them and praying for them. Perhaps, even, physical healing of some form.

These aren't examples of God healing anyone through giving you the specific gift of healing, rather they are examples of God healing people aided by you living your life surrounded by His presence, knowing that His Kingdom is Near and He loves to heal.

Are you trying to tell me that I may have the gift, even if I don't have the gift?

In a way! I am saying that God may use you in many diverse and wondrous ways (not just healing), more and more, as you open yourself up to being used by Him, in trust and love. If you feel you have a specific gift, seek confirmation and then permission, first through the local church and then the wider church. If you truly have this specific gift, you using it will be a great blessing to the body of Christ and to the world. If you don't feel you have a specific gift, let God use you how God wills, and live your life in humility, in trust, and in love.

Do you feel you have a gift from God? Make note of it (or them, if more than one), here. If you feel God is calling you to "specialize" in the use of this gift, seek confirmation and permission first from your local parish (through the incumbent), and then from your diocese (through the bishop). If you do not feel you have a specific gift to specialize in, make note of the many ways which God has generally gifted you and in which He may perhaps use you as you live your life in partnership with Him. For example, you may be a good listener, or a good speaker, or good at hospitality, or good at arranging things, or good at learning things or figuring things out …

Share your gift(s) with those you trust. Listen intently to what people share with you. Do not criticize or offer comment, but pray together.

Day 416: Do not take anything in return

While you will benefit greatly from following Christ and doing what He shows you, you are not to do it for your benefit.

As usual, you've lost me again…

Sorry! I am not meaning to be incomprehensible. Let's say you have two scenarios:

a.) You are offered $10,000 to give a presentation on the importance of following Christ.
b.) You are offered nothing to give a presentation on the importance of following Christ. You are asked to cover your own expenses and get there on your own time.

Which scenario is it more biblical to accept?

Because I don't like it, I'm going to guess scenario two…

You are correct! And your diagnosis is very revealing. Why don't you like scenario two?

Because I don't directly benefit from it – it may even cost me.

Exactly. That is the core of discipleship. "Choose the narrow road, not the wide and easy one." If something directly benefits you, you already have your reward. If something doesn't directly benefit you, then perhaps God is the one getting the reward.

How do I know that God wants it, versus it just being foolishness, or perhaps even contrary to God's desires?

Great question. That takes discernment, both individually and communally. Talk it over with Jesus. Talk it over with those you trust in your local congregation. Talk it over with your priest. If it's beyond the parish, talk it over with your bishop.

Jesus is saying "take nothing in return" because you are not aiming for an immediate reward of money, fame, or fortune, but for a much greater reward: an eternal life of joy with your heavenly Father. Don't lose focus on the greater reward by settling for the lesser one.

Also, give your gift freely, for God gave it to you freely. Out of your abundance from God, give into others' scarcity. Do not put a burden on others which God has not placed on you.

What is God asking you to freely give to others, without charge or compensation?

Share what comes to you with those you trust.

Day 417: Trust that your needs will be provided for

Do not take gold, silver, or copper in your belts; no bag for the journey; or an extra tunic or sandals or staff; for the worker deserves his provisions. Whenever you enter a town or village, find out who is worthy there and stay with them until you leave. (Matthew 10:9-11)

a.) Do not seek to gain from what God has gifted you with (covered in Day 415),
b.) Trust God to provide what you need for your gifts to be effectively used.

We briefly touched on this in day 396.

Yes, and I have the same question – what if you're trusting God to provide what you want, and it doesn't get provided?

Perhaps Jesus gives some guidance here: "find out who is worthy and stay with them." In other words, find someone who can be trusted to provide for you, and then rely on them. Don't rely on those who won't (or can't) provide. Don't rely on blindness. Pray, discern, talk with those around you – if someone asks you to join them, do so, accepting what they gift you with. Do not charge but accept.

What if people offer a little, but not enough? For example, food for supper, but not a bed for the night?

Whenever you have a need, whatever it may be, bring it to God, talk with those around you, and see if the need can be covered. If the need cannot be covered, then perhaps God wants it covered in a different way (do you have enough resources yourself perhaps? Do you need to get a job and provide additional funding that way (like Paul, see Acts 18:3 and 1st Corinthians 9:1-12))?

The bottom line is that if God wants you there and God wants you to use your gift(s), God will find a way for it to happen – though it may be an unexpected way! For example, Paul ministered to the people of Rome by being put in prison there …

I wouldn't like that.

Fair enough. God may not provide in a way that we would like or prefer. But Jesus is saying, "what is needed will be provided for."

Do you have an example of ministry that you tried, where you were not provided for? What did you do? Was the ministry from God or from your own direction? What happened in that harvest field? Do you have an example of ministry which succeeded, but was provided for in an unexpected way?

Share your example(s) with those you trust

Day 418: Give your peace, receive your peace, if you are not accepted, shake the dust off and move on.

What if, despite all you said yesterday, it is a legitimate ministry and simply not provided for? For example, there is no place to live, not even in prison (or similar uncomfortable place)?

Jesus says, "in that case, move on."

How's that?

a.) When you first approach a place or situation, approach it in good will with the best of intentions. "As you enter the house, greet those within it." Freely share from your abundance into the scarcity of the place or situation.
b.) Pray for the shalom of God to come into the place or situation, and let your gift(s) work to introduce shalom into it. "If the house is worthy, let your peace (shalom) come on it,"
c.) If the place or situation refuses to accept the shalom of God, let God's shalom come back to you – do not adopt the worldview, actions or words of a place living outside of the shalom of God. "and if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you."
d.) If you are not welcomed or listened to, do not hold onto that place or situation, nor let it hold onto you, but move on to where you will be allowed to minister. "And if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your message, shake the dust off your feet as you leave that house or that town."

If you are unable to do your ministry, no matter how Godly it is, either through the stubbornness of those involved or through lack of resources, move to where your ministry is accepted and provided for. This may be a different context, time, or place.

Or perhaps you've incorrectly discerned what your ministry is?

Yes, that is a possibility as well. In that case, repeat the guidance of days 413 through 415. It is not a failure to decide your ministry is something different from what you had thought it was.

Have you experienced a ministry which "failed"? Please elaborate. Have you experienced a ministry which "succeeded?" What was the difference-maker between the two occasions?

Share your experiences with your fellow explorers.

Day 419: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! Fill yourself with Light. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God. Be in shalom.