

## **Matthew 9:35-10:14**

**GOD OF COMPASSION, YOU HAVE OPENED THE WAY FOR US AND BROUGHT US TO YOURSELF. POUR YOUR LOVE INTO OUR HEARTS, THAT, OVERFLOWING WITH JOY, WE MAY FREELY SHARE THE BLESSINGS OF YOUR REALM AND FAITHFULLY PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST. AMEN.**

**IN HIS BOOK, *TOKENS OF TRUST: AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN BELIEF*, FORMER ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, ROWAN WILLIAMS, TELLS THE STORY OF A YOUNG JEWISH WOMAN NAMED ETTY HILLESUM WHO WHEN IN HER 20'S THE GERMANS OCCUPIED HOLLAND. SHE WAS NOT A CONVENTIONALLY RELIGIOUS PERSON, BUT BETWEEN THE YEARS OF 1941 AND 1943, AS SHE WATCHED HER WORLD DESCEND INTO NIGHTMARE, SHE BECAME DEEPLY AWARE OF GOD'S HAND ON HER LIFE. IMPRISONED IN THE TRANSIT CAMP AT WESTERBORK (BEFORE BEING SHIPPED TO THE GAS CHAMBERS OF AUSCHWITZ), ETTY WROTE THESE WORDS: "THERE MUST BE SOMEONE TO LIVE THROUGH IT ALL AND BEAR WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT GOD LIVED, EVEN IN THESE TIMES. AND WHY SHOULD I NOT BE THAT WITNESS?"**

**WILLIAMS DESCRIBES ETTY'S COMMITMENT THIS WAY: SHE DECIDED TO OCCUP A CERTAIN PLACE IN THE WORLD, A PLACE WHERE OTHERS COULD SOMEHOW CONNECT WITH GOD THROUGH HER. SHE TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAKING GOD CREDIBLE IN THE WORLD. SHE TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOD'S BELIEVABILITY. OR HAS THE QUOTE GOES: "BE CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE; YOU MAY BE THE ONLY BIBLE SOME PEOPLE EVER READ."**

**YOUR LIFE THE ONLY BIBLE SOME PEOPLE WILL EVER READ. MAKING GOD CREDIBLE IN THE WORLD. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOD'S BELIEVABILITY.**

**HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR THOSE STATEMENTS? WHAT REACTIONS DO YOU HAVE? ALARM? EXCITEMENT? FEAR? DOES IT EVER OCCUR TO US THAT THESE PHRASES MIGHT DESCRIBE OUR VOCATION AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT WE ARE CALLED TO MAKE BELIEF IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD CREDIBLE FOR THE WORLD WE LIVE IN?**

**AND NOT JUST WHEN BELIEF IS EASY, BUT ALSO—AND ESPECIALLY---WHEN BELIEF FEELS IMPOSSIBLE?**

**IN OUR GOSPEL READING THIS MORNING, JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES TO LIBERATE AND ENLIVEN THE “HARRASSED AND HELPLESS.” SEEING THE MULTITUDES OF “SHEEP WITHOUT A SHPHERD,” JESUS IS DEEPLY MOVED, AND SO HE TELLS HIS DISCIPLES, “GO.” GO AND PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM. GO AND CURE THE SICK, RAISE THE DEAD, CLEANSE THE LEPERS, AND CAST OUT DEMONS. GO AND TOUCH. GO AND HEAL. GO AND RESURRECT. GO AND MAKE PEACE.**

**GO AND RENDER BELIEVABLE THE COMPASSION OF GOD. JESUS SENDS THEM AS SHEEP INTO A DEN OF WOLVES.**

**NEEDLESS TO SAY, THIS COMMISSIONING IS FOR US AS WELL. AND JESUS HAS MORE TO SAY: “YOU RECEIVED WITHOUT PAYMENT; GIVE WITHOUT PAYMENT.” “TAKE NO GOLD, OR SILVER, OR COPPER IN YOUR BELTS.” “TAKE NO BAG, OR TWO TUNICS, OR SANDALS, OR STAFF.” “I’M SENDING YOU OUT LIKE SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES, SO BE AS WISE AS SERPENTS AND AS INNOCENT AS DOVES. YOU WILL BE DRAGGED BEFORE GOVERNORS. YOU WILL BE HANDED OVER TO COUNCILS AND FLOGGED. YOU WILL BE HATED BY ALL BECAUSE OF MY NAME.”**

**WOULD YOU SIGN UP? SO, LET’S SEE IF WE HAVE THIS:**

**PRIORITIZE THOSE WHO HAVE NOTHING. GO TO THOSE WHO HAVE NO ONE TO ADVOCATE FOR THEM, NO ONE TO HEAR THEM, NO ONE TO LOOK AFTER THEIR NEEDS. GO TO THE HARRASSED, THE MISTREATED, THE OPPRESSED, AND THE EXHAUSTED.**

**CHOOSE POVERTY, SIMPLICITY, AND VULNERABILITY. CARRY NO WEAPONS. STOCKPILE NO RESOURCES. ABANDON YOUR EGOTISM. LEAD WITH QUIETNESS, GENTLENESS, CURIOSITY AND HUMILITY. SHARE PEACE.**

**DON’T BE FOOLISH. BE WISE. BE ATTENTIVE. LISTEN.**

WHEN YOU'VE DONE ALL OF THE ABOVE, EXPECT LIFE TO GET PRETTY GRIM. KNOW THAT LOTS OF PEOPLE WILL DISTRUST YOU. MANY WELL-MEANING PEOPLE WILL ARGUE WITH YOU. EXPECT TO GET REJECTED AND CALLED OUT. DON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN YOUR LIFE GETS UNCOMFORTABLE.

DO NOT DESPAIR. YOU ARE NOT ALONE. THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS WITH YOU, AND THE SPIRIT WILL GIVE YOU THE WORDS YOU NEED AND THE COURAGE YOU LACK.

THIS IS A CONFRONTATIONAL GOSPEL MESSAGE. IT'S HARD. IT'S DEMANDING. IN IT, JESUS ASKS US TO SURRENDER ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING FOR THE SAKE OF MAKING GOD CREDIBLE TO A HURTING, SIN-FILLED WORLD.

IF OUR OVERRIDING PRIORITY AS CHRISTIANS IS TO SECURE OUR OWN COMFORT, THAN WE CANNOT FOLLOW JESUS. DISCIPLESHIP WILL DISORIENT AND DISRUPT US. IT WILL SHAKE THINGS UP IN OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

AS OUR READING FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS PUT IT: "SUFFERING PRODUCES ENDURANCE, AND ENDURANCE PRODUCES CHARACTER, AND CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE, AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US." SO OFTEN WE CHRISTIANS TRY TO SKIP STRAIGHT TO HOPE AND HUNKER DOWN IN ITS PROMISE, FORGETTING THE SUFFERING PART.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1988 I BEGAN MY INTERNSHIP IN A SMALL CONGREGATION IN NORTHEAST NEBRASKA AND ALTHOUGH INTERNSHIPS WERE NOT REQUIRED AS PART OF MY SEMINARY EXPERIENCE, I FELT IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR ME. THE FIRST SUNDAY I PREACHED THAT SUMMER, THE TEXT WE READ TODAY FROM MATTHEW WAS THE READING FOR THE DAY AND I REMEMBER LIGHT HEARTEDLY PREACHING THAT I DID NOT FEEL LIKE I WAS BEING SENT AS A SHEEP INTO THE MIDST OF WOLVES. IT WAS A WONDERFUL FIRST SUNDAY AND MY HEART WAS FULL OF GLORIOUS HOPE THAT THE NEXT YEAR WOULD BE AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE.

THE VERY NEXT DAY, THE CHURCH SECRETARY, THE SENIOR PASTOR AND I ATTENDED STAFF WORKSHOPS IN LINCOLN. AFTER A LONG DAY IN MEETINGS, THE SECRETARY, MARIAN, AND I DROPPED THE SENIOR PASTOR OFF AT CHURCH CAMP AND MADE THE JOURNEY HOME. I

SUPPOSE WE WERE ABOUT AN HOUR FROM HOME AND AS MARIAN DROVE THE QUIET NEBRASKA HIGHWAY, SHE LEANED OVER AND WITH HER RIGHT HAND, PATTED MY KNEE GENTLY SAYING, "NOW WHAT I'M ABOUT TO SAY, PLEASE DON'T TAKE PERSONALLY." (HAD SHE NOT BEEN DRIVING 55 MILES PER HOUR, I SHOULD HAVE JUMPED.)

AND THE CHURCH SECRETARY, THE VERY PERSON I WOULD BE WORKING WITH DAY IN AND DAY OUT, PROCEEDED TO TELL ME: A LOT OF MEMBERS ARE CONCERNED AND ARE WONDERING IF YOUR HUSBAND COULD TAKE YOUR CALL. WE'VE NEVER HAD A WOMAN PASTOR; WE'VE NEVER EVEN HAD A WOMAN USHER AND THINK YOUR BEING HERE WILL HURT OUR CHURCH. IN FACT, THE SUNDAYS YOU PREACH NOBODY WILL SHOW UP.

MY HUSBAND TAKE MY CALL? AT FIRST I TRULY THOUGHT SHE WAS REFERING TO A TELEPHONE CALL THAT I HAD SOMEHOW MISSED. BUT ONCE I FIGURED OUT SHE WAS REFERRING TO MY CALL FROM GOD...MY CALL FROM JESUS TO SERVE AS A PASTOR...I FELT AS THOUGH SOMEONE HAD PUNCHED ME IN THE GUT. I WAS SPEECHLESS AND THE HOPE I HAD JUST FELT THE DAY PRIOR EVAPORATED. ALL OF A SUDDEN, I DID FEEL AS THOUGH I WAS BEING SENT AS A SHEEP INTO THE MIDST OF WOLVES. AND THEY FELT LIKE I WAS THE WOLF BEING SENT INTO THEIR MIDST.

KEEP IN MIND THIS CHURCH WAS PART OF A DENOMINATION THAT ORDAINED WOMAN. MARION WENT ON TO TELL ME THE ONLY REASON THEY OFFERED ME THE INTERNSHIP WAS BECAUSE ONLY WOMEN APPLIED AND I HAD BEEN THE BEST OUT OF THE GROUP BUT HAD THERE BEEN A MALE, HE WOULD HAVE GOTTEN THE JOB.

BY THE TIME MARION DROPPED ME OFF AT HOME, I WAS A PUDDLE, TELLING MARTY WE NEEDED TO LEAVE AND MOVE BACK TO DENVER ASAP. AND I WAS REMINDED OF THE GOSPEL WORDS I HAD JUST SPOKEN THE DAY PRIOR: IF ANYONE WILL NOT WELCOME YOU OR LISTEN TO YOUR WORDS, SHAKE OFF THE DUST FROM YOUR FEET AS YOU LEAVE TOWN.

ANY IDEAS HOW THE STORY ENDED?

WE DIDN'T PACK UP AND LEAVE AND I WENT TO WORK AT THE CHURCH THE NEXT DAY. SO DID MARION. AND SO BEGAN A FRIENDSHIP THAT LASTED BEYOND THE YEAR I WAS AT THE

CHURCH. I WISH I COULD TELL YOU MARION AND I HAD A HEART TO HEART TALK ABOUT MY KEEPING AND CLAIMING MY CALL FROM GOD AND THAT MARTY WAS NOT GOING TO BE THEIR ASSOCIATE PASTOR. BUT WE DIDN'T. IT WAS ACTUALLY VERY SIMPLE....WE GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER. KNEW WE EACH LOVED JESUS AND WANTED TO SERVE HIM AND THAT BECAME THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FRIENDSHIP. WE LIVED IN HOPE THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD WAS AT WORK! AND THE SPIRIT WAS ALIVE THAT ENTIRE YEAR AND IT IS A TIME MARTY AND I FONDLY REMEMBER. I WAS INVITED BACK YEARS LATER TO PREACH AT THE CONGREGATION'S 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY.

WHY DOES JESUS ASK SO MUCH OF US? BECAUSE HE GAVE SO MUCH. "YOU RECEIVED WITHOUT PAYMENT. NOW GIVE WITHOUT PAYMENT." MAYBE, IF WE CAN PUT ASIDE OUR RELUCTANCE AND OUR FEAR TO FOLLOW AND SERVE HIM, WE WILL FEEL THE POWER AND GLORY OF THIS CALLING. JESUS KNOWS THAT WHEN WE GO OUT INTO THE WORLD IN HIS NAME, HEALING WHAT IS DISEASED AND CASTING OUT WHAT IS EVIL, WE PARTICIPATE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR OWN SOULS.

SOMEONE HAS TO LIVE AND BEAR WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT GOD IS ALIVE, EVEN IN THESE DAYS. SO ASK YOURSELF: WHY SHOULDN'T THE WITNESS BE ME?