

A Call To Action
Matthew 9:9-13; 18-26
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First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI

Last winter after my surgery, I couldn't go out and do a whole lot, so naturally I watched TV. And for lack of anything else to watch I started watching Donald Trump's show celebrity apprentice. Yes I know groundbreaking television.

I was struck by a particular conversation that actor Stephen Baldwin and Australian celebrity Pierce Morgan the eventual winner. These two became bitter rivals. In one candid conversation as they were airing some things out Baldwin asked Morgan when he was going to give his life to Jesus Christ. Morgan responded by saying why did he assume he hadn't. He explained he was raised catholic, goes to the catholic church, graduated catholic school etc. He also said that he was Glad that Baldwin has this great conversion experience but he shouldn't presume that he needed to have one too.

Then... there's always a then isn't there. The show went on and I watched as these two lied and cheated, using every cut-throat tactic to win the contest. All for charity of course. But the question still stands, why wouldn't Baldwin know Pierce Morgan was a Christian. For that matter how does Baldwin look making these claims. Our actions speak louder than our words. On this peace with Justice Sunday we are reminded that Jesus call to the people of God is a call to action, not just a call to feeling or even thinking, but to action. John Wesley called this the fruits of the Spirit.

In our Gospel lesson this morning Jesus makes a call to a tax collector. And invites him to follow. Jesus goes so far to sit at table with him and others, who are thought of as unrighteous. After taking the ridicule he simply responds that the well have no need of a physician. He is there to call the unrighteous. His goal was not to leave them in that state however, but instead was to make them righteous through him. Both a change of heart, but also a call to action to spread the good news of Christ. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

The challenge for us is to go and learn what this means. What does it mean when actors and the rich get together and associate with the rich and use every means necessary to get rich, even for a good cause if they do not take up that call to follow him.

There are many things in our world today that are in need of our care and support. The list is almost overwhelming. The environment and care of this planet, the perpetual violence that exists in this country, the violence and suffering and death that exists in this world, the health care needs of our children and youth.

Later in our Gospel passage Jesus demonstrates the engaging of those who are in need. When asked to come to the aid for the leaders dying daughter Jesus didn't say what's wrong or even where is she, he simply got up and went. While he was on route he couldn't even get there without a hemorrhaging women seeking to be healed. Does he send her away and say no I'm busy, maybe later? He simply says your faith has made you well. Jesus takes action.

I was struck by a few things recently. One as Bill Gates Sr. addressed the General Conference thanking the United Methodist Church for our support of the Nothing But Nets campaign, to combat the Malaria epidemic. He said specifically that they needed our organization and our know how to get into the places where the help can be distributed. That is taking action and inviting others to join us.

I was also struck on this past Tuesday as we heard from Vietnamese Missionaries Karen and Ut To regarding how they escaped Vietnam in the late 70's spending 15 days on a boat with only enough food for 2 days, living as refugees in Thailand for 7 month's before coming to Canada first then to Michigan. Of how the United Methodist church reached out to them and answered their call to ministry, but the courage that it also took to go back to Vietnam and establish churches in that country. After having to meet in secret fearing for their safety and fleeing to Cambodia or Laos at times, but starting churches there as well, and working to the point where they are now recognized and accepted. That is taking action in a place many of us would not dare to go.

At the same time Dr. Don Messer commented on how short we had come in 4 years of making the goal of raising \$8 million for the global AIDS fund. Why? Why can we do so well with malaria, but turn a denying eye to AIDS?

There are other stories too from around the world. Yet in our own mission field in the United States, why is the church leaving the inner city? Why are we not making a concerted effort in the US to build the church among the poor, to reach out and minister to those who are in need?

Why do we worry so much about illegal immigrants in this country who come seeking a better life, rather than combat the governments and societies who violate their human rights and dignity that they come like so many others here to find a better life. All in the name of cheaper stuff for us.

Our Peace with Justice offering will address these issues and many more because we as the United Methodist Church have long stood for the call to action that Jesus has on our lives. We have eaten with the tax collectors and sinners, and we have embraced Wesley's call that there is no holiness but social holiness, there is no justice but social. You cannot become holy by withdrawing from the world but by working in the world. What way is God calling you to answer Jesus call to action? Is it by participating in this summers mission trip, or helping with community meal. Perhaps it is through second mile giving to fund these ministries of Justice and Peace. Let us reflect on that call to action and listen to God's voice and where we are being led in faith for spreading Peace and Justice in our land.