

**WITH THE SPIRIT'S GIFTS EMPOWER US
FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY**
Ephesians 4:7, 11-16 & Luke 10:1-2

Today's Gospel words of Jesus about the harvest being plentiful but the laborers are few are printed in Creole above the altar on the Eastern wall of the Church of the Resurrection in Gros Morne, Haiti, where our mission group representing St. John's and L'Eglise de L'Epiphanie served two weeks ago. Jesus invited his disciples to "*ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" Our mission group took encouragement and joy in those words because while we could evidently see the tremendous human needs of the people we came to work with and serve – the harvest is indeed plentiful – we felt honored and humbled to realize that we were among those laborers the Lord had sent out into his harvest.

Today we are privileged to celebrate the new ministries of Karen Halac, St. John's Director of Christian Education, Karl Griswold-Kuhn, our Seminarian Intern and the Rev. Elizabeth Skaleski our Deacon. Taking the Gospel metaphor of laborers and harvest we could picture ourselves as God's field and these three as the laborers God sends. And indeed I believe that God has sent them to labor among us and through God's grace to reap a rich harvest. But I do not want to think of us merely as God's field. For God calls each of us to be laborers as well. God's field is much, much bigger than St. John's Church; his field is the world. And he promises us that his field is ripe for harvest.

The old perspective is that the role of the ministers is to *minister* and the role of the congregation is to well, *congregate*. But, that is not a Gospel perspective. Jesus called all his followers to be laborers in his Father's fields. And furthermore he invited us to pray that God would send even more laborers for God's harvest is ripe.

The Apostle Paul's words in the 4th chapter of Ephesians are a description of God calling, sending and empowering laborers within the Christian community. Everyone is called and sent. "*Each of us,*" Paul writes – each and every one of us – has been "*given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.*" Every one of us has gifts and abilities and time and service to contribute to the work of ministry.

Paul then lays out the more visible and prominent gifts of leadership that Christ has given in the Christian community: "*some would be Apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.*" Today we celebrate the gifts given to us through the ministries of our Director of Christian Education, our Seminarian Intern and Deacon. A key thing we need to remember is the purpose Paul tells us that we have been given these gifts in the first place: "*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*" In each of their different spheres of responsibility Karen, Karl and Liz's work is to *equip* the saints (all of us) for the work of ministry. The Greek word translated as *equip* – *katartizein* – is used in surgery for the setting of a broken bone or setting a joint that is out of place, in politics is the bringing together of two opposing factions. William Barclay writes:

The basic idea of the word is that of putting a thing or a person into the condition in which he or it ought to be. It is the function of the office-bearers of the Church to see that the members of the Church are so educated, so helped, so guided, so cared for, so sought out when they go astray, that they become what they ought to be. The office-bearer of the Church holds office not for one's own honor but for the help he or she can give fellow members within the Church.

So, Karen, Karl and Liz's main work is to *empower* us, to *strengthen*, to *set right*, to *perfect*, to *mend*, to *encourage* and *help make us ready* for ministry. That is also the main work of Mother Julia, myself, of the Vestry and of all the leaders of this church.

But the interesting thing is that the people's work is not merely to be *empowered*. We are indeed to receive that work and be empowered. But we – each of us – are also called to share the gifts that Christ has given us so that we might also *empower* each other for the work of ministry. We are called both to be *empowered* and to *empower*.

The thing we are supposed to empower or set each other right for is *the work of ministry*. The work of *diakonia*, which can also be translated as *service*. And of course the work of that *service* or *ministry* is why we exist as a Church. That is our purpose, our mission.

Here's how we lay out our particular mission at St. John's Church:

St. John's is a wonderfully diverse community of faith rooted in the heart of downtown Stamford, where the Holy Spirit is leading us toward a new humanity in Christ. We embrace this vision by welcoming all people to:

- *Celebrate God in the beauty of holiness through the richness of Anglican worship and glorious music;*
- *Strengthen their spiritual journeys through prayer, study and scripture; and*
- *Serve as instruments of God's peace, justice and love in the world.*

Do you notice how our mission lays out that we are both to be *empowered* – to be *strengthened in our spiritual journeys by prayer, study and scripture*, to be enriched and made whole as we worship *in the beauty of holiness* – and also called to *empower* others? We are called to *serve as instruments of God's peace, justice and love in the world*. In our rich diversity we are called to become nothing less than Christ's *new humanity*.

We at St. John's are so blessed to have Karen, Karl and Liz as leaders to help empower, mend, shape and mold us into the kind of new humanity God is calling us to be. Each one brings wonderful gifts: love of God, a desire to serve, integrity, openness to others, a desire to grow deeper, and a passion for ministry. It is a joy to celebrate their ministries today.

It is also a joy to celebrate each of our ministries. For the great promise of Paul's words to the Ephesians is that "*each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.*" Each of us has been given the capacity to be empowered for ministry and through their own gifts of ministry to empower others. What unique gifts has Christ given you to

minister to others? What opportunities – perhaps through Karen, Karl or Liz’s ministry – is Christ giving you to grow and be strengthened – *empowered* – in your Christian life? What areas of weakness or brokenness do you need to have set right (as bone that needs to be reset) in order to be a healthier minister of Christ’s good news?

The harvest is indeed plentiful. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers – you and me – into his harvest.