

***“Sacrifice”**
(Matt 9:35-10:8)
June 14, 2020

*“Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.” This was the same ministry Jesus started in Matt 4:23 after he called his first disciples: *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” *He did heal the servant of a centurion in the vicinity of Capernaum once, but his ministry was mainly among the people *who were at the grass-root level of the Jewish community in Galilee. He was not among them unprepared. He had consistently at least two things to offer, **the good news and **the cure. *In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5 – 7), Jesus characterized the good news in the form of a new lifestyle, with illustrations of how different groups of people could live together. He offered new insights into the state of blissfulness and emphasized the importance of watching the motivation behind all actions. *Sicknesses, diseases, and death are integral parts of life. Nobody liked them, but no one should be scared of them and treated them like gods, *like authorities that demand obedience through coercion. At the end of Jesus’ ministry, before his departure, *he declared that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him (Matt 28: 18). Jesus showed them heartily that *God was the only one to whom they should devote their lives. He assured them with his power of cure and wonder.

The more time he spent with this crowd of ordinary men and women, the deeper he understood their real-life situations. He felt for them *because they were harassed and helpless, betrayed by their political as well as religious leaders, like sheep without a shepherd. *Faith has been turned into something legalistic that tends to discourage, instead of encouraging, to weigh people down with burdens, instead of lifting them with wings.

*Life has been changed a lot for us in the past decades. I still remember the first time I came to Canada for a visit was about 30 years ago. I was brought to a Chinese restaurant at Steeles and Warden Ave in Markham. The area was so undeveloped, I would say it looked more like a rural area than Georgina now. I know that people in Georgina expressed their opinions against the opening of businesses in Georgina on Sundays in the old days. Nobody would uphold the same idea anymore now, I believe.

Can we then say *we are in better shape when we compared ourselves to the group of people whom Jesus encountered? We have better housing, reliable community infrastructure, pathed roads, highways, internet connection, prosperity, and a lot more. Of course, we are in better shape.

Do you still remember the moments *when a lot of groceries were out of stock recently? *We were desperate and frustrated, not because of lack of money, but because the supply was not replenished fast enough. Our worries seemed to be *at a higher level, related to the supply and logistics,

but don't forget, the root of the problems remains the same. There are still a lot of people *who can't afford what they need. They always have to wait for their next paychecks that might or might not come. And the number of this group of people keeps growing. Jesus would see them *also as harassed and helpless, sheep without a shepherd. We have them among us, and we might become one of them. Being negatively labeled and maltreated all the time is not funny. These unpleasant experiences would not improve over time by itself if there is no suitable intervention. *A small number of people might still have choices over their professions, nationalities, and religious beliefs, however, more and more people do not find it this way. Things are changing so fast that most people don't know how to get along with the changes. *We are more used to the well-developed modern society with the middle class forms the bulk of it. However, this is also changing. *The "M-shape society" is emerging because the middle class is shrinking and disappearing. Very few people in the middle class can climb up the ladder and be able to be part of the upper class. The result of it is that most from the middle class would gradually sink to the lower-income group. We might need to reconsider our situation regularly. Are we in a better position? *Or are we somewhat like the people back then, like sheep without a shepherd?

*"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." What does it mean, *'the harvest'? *Does it mean something valuable, that can be sold or traded? If that's what a lot of people would think, Jesus' intention would be surprising to them. Just take a look at the twelve disciples Jesus called.

Among them, there was *Matthew the tax collector, one who sold himself into the hands of the Roman Empire against his own people for monetary gain, and there was *Simon the Cananaean, one who prepared to face any kind of death for the freedom of Israel. Simon could have stuck a dagger into Matthew. Don't forget, there was also *Judas who betrayed Jesus, and many fishermen. They were the harvest if we consider Jesus as the first laborer sent by God to work in the field. For Jesus, 'the harvest' **were the ones who were harassed, helpless, and lost. *They might all be different, but they all had the same human needs and required spiritual guidance. Who could support and provide that? That person could be anyone, as long as one important element is considered, i.e. *sacrifice.

Jesus sacrificed himself *by departing from his comfort zone, i.e. leaving his family and the folks he grew up with. Jesus sacrificed himself by *exposing himself to individuals and groups that had different or even opposing agendas, i.e. the untouchables, marginalized, patriots, rebels, ordinary people, and elites. Jesus sacrificed himself *by giving up his private space, i.e. be a friend to the underdogs, and be a rival to the privileged.

When Jesus sent the twelve to do the ministry like his, he instructed them to try it out with people they were familiar with. *"Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans." These instructions didn't reflect the final goal of his ministry since he did reach out to the Gentiles and the Samaritans. So are we ready to try it out too *with the people close to us, to offer them and us another chance to pursue peace?

*“You received without payment; give without payment.” The earthly authority shall not be the laborers’ goal. What they should look for, what we should look for, *is a process of transformation. It happens first with ourselves, be willing to sacrifice, and then with others so that their spiritual, bodily, and political needs would be met. Remember, *communities of faith provide resources for resilience. We are all living together like a flock, *deserved to have a shepherd, a good leader that shall not fail us. We can learn from the ways how Jesus sacrificed himself. we can combat isolation, cope with the rapid changes of this world, and respond to the most needed with compassion. *Let’s carry God’s love and care with us. Bring them to our families, our acquaintances, and make this world safer. May God help us. Amen.