

Matthew 9:37-38
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“The Jesus Team”

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If you have been following the Milwaukee Brewers last night they completed an exciting run into League Baseball’s postseason. Last night was game 7 of the National League Championship series, with the winner going to the World Series, and they came up just a few runs short.

If you have followed the Brewers run you probably know the impact made by hitters who are often thought of as easy outs. The 7th – 9th batters accounted for only about 17 percent of the team’s offensive production during the regular season, but through the playoffs they have been a major part of the team’s success.

As MVP Candidate Christian Yelich and others were trying to regain their regular season form, these bottom of the order batters provided a very unexpected lift to the Brewers offense.

This reminds us that even in professional sports, while a star player may carry a team for a while, success over an entire season takes the whole team.

In a way, that’s what Jesus is saying today. When we step back from the two verses we read from Matthew Chapter 9, verses which have served as the theme for our stewardship campaign this year, we find that Jesus is looking for teammates.

Verses 37-38 end the 9th chapter of the gospel of Matthew. But that chapter begins with Jesus doing ministry at a frantic pace; he heals a paralytic, he calls Matthew, a tax collector, to follow him. Next, we find him answering questions about fasting, then he restores a girl to life, heals a woman, heals 2 blind men, heals a mute... and all in one chapter.

Our stewardship theme, “The Harvest is great, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray to the lord of the Harvest to send out laborers” becomes a call to join The Jesus team. As we continue to put these two verses in context, we see just after them, in Chapter 10 Jesus starts drafting his team as he summons his 12 disciples, gives them authority to heal, and sends them out with instructions to enact God’s bounty, health and abundance wherever they go.

Jesus is busy, he is tired, he wants help, so he asks for his followers to become a team of Harvesters. Harvest season was a beautiful and important season of the year in Jesus’ day, much like today. It was the time when the year’s work bared fruit and the people were fed. God and Humankind each had a part to play in the Harvest. Farmers need to do their part in planting but the focus during harvest remained on the work of the Lord in bringing it to completion. This is reinforced in Exodus 34 where, even during the busy harvest season, Sabbath rest was to be honored as a way to keep the focus on God.

An online blogger shared this story of going to his friend’s laboratory where he is a chemist. “There I saw a sign on the wall of the lab that said: Safety Reminder: Many Hands Make Light

Work!’ Looking below that, handwritten in black marker someone had comically added; ‘Gee. All these years of schooling and I thought it was wave/particle duality.’”

As we have been pondering the question, “What is God Calling Me to Give?” Our response becomes another opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to being on Jesus’ team. Remember giving isn’t only a dollar amount on a commitment card, it includes sharing all God’s gifts including our precious time, the knowledge and abilities we have, it includes naming and nurturing one another’s spiritual gifts, caring for and loving each other, and learning to be a community.

Some of you know, over the last few years I have taken an interest in learning about community. Community can be another way of talking about being a team. In 2016, Peace Corp Volunteer Gabriela Carmo wrote about a powerful experience she had in community. Gabriela is a naturalized American citizen, born in Brazil to Missionary parents. Her role in the Peace Corp was teaching, primarily, 10th and 11th grade chemistry. She also worked with the secondary school in the development of a community library and youth groups, with the aim of sensitizing the students to the realities of HIV, malaria and gender inequality.

Gabriela writes, “I don’t believe I ever realized the true importance of community until I came to Mozambique. I had a community back home that challenged and encouraged, loved and supported me. But here, in a small dirt yard shared by four families and myself, I’ve found a deeper importance to community. Of actually doing life together, day in and day out. We wash clothes together, carry water together, cook together. There is never a need that cannot be fulfilled; from hot coals to light fire to an extra onion or two, there is always someone to help you. We take turns going to the market for each other, we take care of each other’s children, feeding, clothing, bathing them.

But most importantly, we sit together. We sit in silence. We sit in the shade. We laugh as children play. We complain of the heat and the market prices. We teach each other to dance and words in Nyanja and English. We live our lives, together. I never imagined that life could be so full with so little. I may seem to be living with less, but I am living with infinitely more than I thought I would be living with in sub-Saharan Africa.”

She concludes, “Never underestimate the value of your community – they will carry you when you’ve fallen, comfort you when you’ve lost, laugh with you in your joy, care for you in your weakness, walk with you in your loneliness. I learn from my community each day, and as I begin to discover more about myself and life in Mozambique I find that my gratitude for their love is unending.”

Eugene Peterson in The Message rephrases the passage which inspires our Stewardship this season, “Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, healed their diseased bodies, and healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they

were, like sheep with no shepherd. “What a huge harvest!” he said to his disciples. “How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!”

How can you and I be an answer to prayer? How can we become better team members with Jesus?

Alleluia!! Amen!!