

In the ninth grade I attended a private school associated with a Baptist Church; there I participated in a weekly activity called *soul winning*

Each Tuesday a fellow student and I would pop in on an unsuspecting family
These weren't exactly cold calls;
they were people who had filled out a visitor's cards at the church

Not unlike Mormon missionaries,
we were sent out, two by two, to preach and proselytize
First, we'd gather at the church, be handed a card with a name and address,

Next the pastor would dismiss us with these words:
The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;
Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Needless to say, this awkward, 14 year-old Episcopalian –
was not particularly eager to share his faith with anyone, let alone strangers
Truth be told, a part of me still cringes when I hear snippets of today's gospel

It brings back some very confrontative, unpleasant memories
And the biblical injunction-
to shake off the dust from my feet was not especially helpful

Yet this is how Matthew recounts the Commissioning of the 12 Disciples
Our Lord's instructions on how to make more disciples
Jesus' helpful, practical advice
Here's how I understand the Great Commissioning today

Before jumping into any action, PRAY
Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest
Through this simple supplication many who pray discern a call to respond

Here I am Lord, it is I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
First prayer, then discernment, then action
This is the sequence we are meant to follow as we make disciples

Now a call is by no means limited to the call to ordained ministry
All Baptized Christians have a calling
An intimate personal relationship with God always leads to callings

Callings which ultimately lead us into *The Flow of God*,
the Kingdom of God, *outside of time*.
Yet simultaneously, the Kingdom of God, *the Flow of God*
right here, right now,

There are all sorts of calls
Lifetime calls like the call to be a parent or the call to Holy Orders
Intermittent calls like career changes and job relocations
And **short-term** calls, calls to specific action,
Calls that are accomplished within a single day, hour or even moment

However, we all share one **collective lifelong call**;
The call to make disciples;
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations
That's a given.

The next step is to discern which part each of us is to play in this collective call

We discern our specific unique call through prayer, meditation-
and purposeful time spent with the Holy Spirit.

All of us have been given different gifts of the Holy Spirit
Some gifts are obvious,
Like the gift of musical talent or the gifts of quick minds or pleasant personalities
The gift of hospitality, the gift of gab

Some gifts are less obvious, like kind and sympathetic hearts –
or the gift simply to sit and listen
Spiritual gifts may lay dormant for years
With God's help, we spend a lifetime discerning these gifts

Whatever our gifts, we are meant to use them, enjoy them,
And to be grateful for them
Each time we respond to our *collective lifelong call*,
We do so with our God given gifts and talents

Whenever we respond to the call to make disciples
Or as my Baptist friends say,
Whenever we witness or give our testimony,
God gives us various gifts to proclaim the good news

We're already equipped to preach the good news
And if necessary to use words.

Reflecting our rather unfair reputation as being the Church of the *Frozen Chosen*
Aggressive evangelism sounds very un-Episcopalian
We hardly ever even use the word.

For whatever reason it doesn't seem to be part of our Anglican DNA-
To publicly preach and testify
or to carry banners urging passersby to *Repent or Perish*

But we, particularly the people and parish of Good Shepherd,
Are richly blessed with profound gifts and with an abundance of talents

And the best thing about these gifts is that we recognize them,
We're grateful for them, and we use them to evangelize.
We may not recognize this as evangelism
But it is just as much evangelism as knocking on peoples' doors.

I have been active in parish life since I was twelve years old;
I've been a priest for 33 years
And during all that time I have never known a parish quite like ours

Our gifts of hospitality are enormous
The genuine welcome and inclusion of newcomers is palpable
Opportunities for Christian fellowship and Christian education flourish

We have laborers of all sorts working in our kitchen, in our Memorial Garden,
In the sacristy and flower room, overseeing our building and grounds
We have artists, teachers, musicians, volunteers, and superb lay leadership,
The likes of which I have never encountered.

Gratitude not pride
Always keeping in mind,
From everyone whom much has been given, much will be required

*Come labor on
Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain
While all around [us waves the golden grain](#)
And to each servant does the Master say
Go work today.*