

“Serving” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
June 18, 2017 Second Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 9:35 – 10:23

Prayer: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Joni, the quadriplegic Christian who paints with brush in mouth and has several ministries for the disabled, posted this story on her website. Carolyn is in her late 60's and lives alone. She has 4 grown children who all live either out of state or at a far distance. How does Carolyn serve others? She packs Joni's suitcase when Joni travels. Being a quadriplegic with no arms or legs, Joni can't pack it herself, but Carolyn does it for Joni – and Joni really appreciates Carolyn's willingness to assist Joni in this important way. Every time Joni travels she prays with Carolyn thanking the Lord that Carolyn is willing to serve Him by helping her, a quadriplegic, pack her suitcase and hanging bag. A simple story of serving others.

A story from a bit closer to home. In October 2007, with a wildfire blazing in the hills nearby, the residents of Julian, California, were under orders to evacuate. But less than 24 hours after fleeing to safety, Christy Connell, 46, co-owner of the Julian Bakery and Cafe, raced back home. "I'd heard from one of the volunteers helping evacuees that the firefighters battling the blaze didn't have anything to eat," she says. "And feeding people is what I do best."

The power was out in town, so she and a few other residents who hadn't evacuated hauled over an industrial-size propane grill from the firehouse a few blocks away. She set it up on the street in front of her restaurant and started pots of beef and beans cooking. The fire chief sent out official word to those battling the blaze that the Julian Cafe was the place to eat. Soon the first group of famished firefighters rolled in on their trucks. Coming straight from the front lines, they shed their gear and dove into their first meal in 12 hours—showering Christy with hugs and spontaneous applause. "You get a group of men who haven't

eaten for 12 hours and you'll see how grateful they can get," she laughs. "The joy of just feeding them was enough for me."

For four days, Christy spent nearly 20 hours a day cooking burritos, chicken, steak sandwiches and other food from her restaurant, and serving slices of the cafe's signature apple pie. Every few hours one of the other locals who'd stayed in town took over grill duty, giving Christy a chance to go home and get a little sleep. (Luckily, the fire didn't spread.) All told, she served 1,100 meals—at no charge. Steve Sheppard, battalion chief for the Julian Fire Department, says Christy provided much more than comfort food that week: "To have someone stay behind and say, 'I'm here for you guys'—that means a lot."

What did Carolyn and Christy have in common with Jesus? They had compassion for those who needed help. Our scripture today says that Jesus had compassion for the crowds who were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

What else did Carolyn and the folks in Julian have in common with Jesus? They saw a need and were moved to action. Jesus sent out twelve disciples to help those who were in need. Carolyn and Christy helped in ways that they could with the talents God had given them. Carolyn a great organizer, Christy a great cook.

Jesus charged the disciples to go out and proclaim that 'the kingdom of God has come near.' The disciples were to share the good news and to help others. Jesus used the disciples to expand his ministry. Limited by his human body, he couldn't do it all himself so he gave the disciples the power to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Pretty powerful commissioning.

Jesus' words issue a challenge to us. We know you and I are to go out and minister to others. Can you imagine healing the sick? There are cures for many diseases that were once thought to be incurable. The sick are healed. Can you imagine raising the dead? From one perspective, this is happening today when we consider that people are being cured of once fatal diseases and go on living productive lives.

This scripture may challenge some of us to move outside our comfort zone and tell others the kingdom of God has come near – to share your faith. This scripture may challenge some of us to give more of our time to help others who are harassed and helpless especially if we're reluctant to talk to people like that. Jesus asks each of us to go and tell others about Christ and to share our time and energy to help others.

How can we do that, you ask? Working in the programs your church supports is one way. Having a ministry of your own as simple as Carolyn's suit case packing is another.

We can't do it alone. That's the key. When we think about some big job that may seem impossible, we have to depend, like the disciples, on God's power – not our own. Like I said last week, we have to depend on the power of God – or we will fail.

Helping others - following Jesus' directive.

Let's listen now to how our Session proposes that we move forward as a church to serve others.

Closing comments after the talk.

Our church has stepped up. You know the ministries we're doing. Now, it's time to depend on God for the power to expand those ministries. It's time to consider how you can personally be involved in some type of ministry serving others. Whether it's as simple as packing a suitcase or driving someone to the doctor's office – or as involved as gathering and delivering Christmas gifts down valley or filling food bags to deliver to the those who are less fortunate. – we all can do something by accepting Jesus' challenge to serve others and by depending on God to make it happen.