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“We are God’s co-workers” (1 Cor 3:9).

1 Cor 3:1-9; Luke 4:38-44

Today’s readings are a window into the start of Jesus’ campaign to announce the Kingdom of God and, two decades later, the work of Paul to sustain that campaign in Corinth.

Jesus begins his ministry in his hometown, as many leaders do, reading Isaiah’s messianic promise of restoration and liberation. He demonstrates the power of his ministry by freeing a man possessed by a demon in Capernaum. In today’s Gospel, he heals the mother-in-law of Peter and then plunges into a throng of people bringing their sick to him at sunset, healing them with the touch of his hands and ordering unclean spirits to depart.

The scene has cinematic power, Jesus moving among the sick as nightfall approaches, a light pushing back the darkness, calming the fearful, restoring hope and wholeness to broken lives, rescuing those struggling against the demons in theirs. His disciples must have been in awe at the effect of his presence and their new status as his lieutenants. After a short night, they awaken to find him missing. People are eager to see him and witness more miracles.

Jesus had risen early and slipped away to a deserted place to pray. When the crowds find him, he tells them he must preach the Kingdom in other towns, for this is his primary mission. This is not a traveling medicine show but the opening salvo of God’s plan of salvation, the triumph of love and justice over the forces of sin and death that have so long ruled human history. “Behold, the reign of God is at hand! Repent, and hear good news!”

A generation later, St. Paul had brought this message to the Greco-Roman world, to both Jews and Gentiles like the people in Corinth. Forming community among them has not been easy, and Paul writes to chide rival factions and converts slow to accept the discipline of the Gospel in their sexual mores and class differences. What Jesus preached, died and rose to proclaim to the world will require evangelists, pastors and servant leaders. Paul calls them God’s co-workers.

We are those co-workers. God honors our freedom by giving us the tools and the gifts to continue the mission of Jesus. We lament our broken world, pray for healing, and the Holy Spirit invites us to unite to make it happen. We are now the hands of

Jesus, and if we have the faith to reach out and touch the sick and those struggling with demons, they will be whole again. We are the face of the risen Christ, and his light through us will push back the night of fear and despair. If there is dissension in our communities as there was in Paul's, we must remember that it is God who is at work among us, and if we focus all our energies on God's work, we will become the Beloved Community Jesus proclaimed.

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