

THE STRESS OF BEING SPECIAL

(Matthew 9:37-10:4)

In the three pieces of scripture we have printed out before us today, there seems to be a couple of themes that run through them that could be of interest to us on this almost-summer-Sunday morning.

- **One of those themes is *the belief that everyone and everything is under the domain of our ever-present creator God* (could THAT be of interest to you this morning?).** In our reading from Ex. 19, v.5 has God saying “Indeed, the whole earth is mine . . .” That is a pretty clear statement of ownership and domain if I ever heard one! Our reading from Romans 5 tells us that through the sacrifice made for us by Jesus, *we have peace with the God in whose grace we stand*—and I want to add not only in whose grace we stand—but in whose grace we *live, and move, and breathe, and have our being*. The *creative grace* we receive from our *creator God* covers us *so completely* that even as we fall FROM grace in the eyes of others, we fall back INTO the grace that is the

ever-present hand of God! Maybe THAT'S why they call God's grace "amazing." **Our reading from Matthew 9-10** has Jesus telling his disciples to *pray to the Lord of the harvest* for MORE disciples—or laborers—to work in the harvest. In the theology of Jesus, the "*Lord of the Harvest*" is God, the same God who has dominion over all things. ***So we hear all three of our lessons this morning telling us about a God who is ever-present, who has grace-filled love for us, and whose domain covers all things.***

- **Another theme that seems to run through our scriptures today is that our ever-present, grace-filled creator God has made us all unique, and in that uniqueness we are chosen by God for a purpose in this world that is uniquely our own. It is in that unique purpose that we are all "special" in the heart and plan of God. In Exodus 19** it is Israel that is chosen for a special purpose: God instructs Moses—who has his OWN story of being specially purposed by God—to tell the Israelites, "*You shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. . . you shall be for me*

*a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” In Romans 5 it is Christ himself who was chosen by God, purposed as *a proof of God’s love for us, dying for us while we were still sinners.* In Matthew 10, it is the twelve men that were chosen by *prayer*—but who had already been purposed by *God*—to be the inner circle of Jesus, the leaders of the radical alternative community that Jesus was calling into being to do constant battle with the spirits and manifestations of things that *do not have their foundation* in the love of God for everyone! Just as God *chose and purposed Israel* to be a holy nation; just as God *chose and purposed Jesus* to shed blood for the sins and sinners of the world; just as God *chose and purposed* the first twelve apostles to go forth into an unbelieving world with the good news; so God also chooses and purposes *each and every one of us* to be something uniquely special and to *do* something uniquely special that highlights the revealing of God’s kingdom in the midst of this world. Something that, because we are all so “fearfully and wonderfully made” by God,*

only WE can do. *So we see in our lessons today the uniqueness of our God-given purpose, and our specialness in the ever-revealed and ever-revealing plan of God.*

II.

So, we are indeed ALL special in God's sight. We may not be so special in *each other's* sight, but we are indeed ALL special in God's sight, and are pre-natally purposed to fit in a *special way* in God's unfolding plan!

As *joyful* and as *grateful* and as *connected* as just that very thought can make you feel, I want to remind us this morning that there is a certain amount of *stress* that comes with being *special*. Some of us who don't know what special REALLY IS yet may think being "special" puts us out of the realm of so many annoying and detrimental things—like stress, for example. But I'm here to share with you this morning that even in the joy and connectedness of our specialness in God's sight and in the midst of the world, there's some *stress* that comes with that specialness.

Now, I know this is turning out to be a bitter-sweet proclamation so far; but let's examine some of the causes of this stress that comes with being special, and see if we can't add some good news to that bitter-sweet recipe.

There are many ways that our specialness in God's purpose for us comes with its own stress. Let's briefly look at three of those ways.

✚ *It is often the case that the discovery of our special purpose yields something that we don't feel qualified or equipped to do.*

Now THERE'S some stress for you! Sometimes, because of the real or imagined failures and frailties that we have become convinced are a part of us, we don't see ourselves as worthy to do what we are discovering is our purpose. That happened often in scripture, just like it happens in our lives today. **Moses reminded God that he had a stammering tongue, and couldn't speak God's words to Pharaoh to "let my people go."** **Jeremiah reminded God of how young he himself was, too young to be a prophet.** **Mary**

reminded God that she hadn't had a man, so couldn't possibly give birth to a son. In our own present-day lives we can feel inadequate to fulfill what we are being led to believe is our specialness, our purpose. I certainly believed God made God's first mistake when I felt my calling to be to pastor, preach to, and teach God's people. I felt woefully inadequate for that—and still do. Some people can feel wholly overwhelmed and outmatched in their special calling to be a parent, or a teacher, or a farmer, or an engineer, or an artist, or a nurse, or an executive, or a custodian, or a church-worker, or whatever their purpose might be. All those things are important, special, purposed by God—and stressful if you don't feel qualified or equipped to do them. What all the stressed-out people in scripture found—just like we who are stressed-out about our purpose can find today—is that *if your purpose does not intimidate you, it may not be God's purpose for you*. Because God's purpose for us is always *bigger* than us, so that we won't forget that we can't fulfill our God-given purpose

without God! Because God is the One who is able, who knew us and purposed us and made us special before we were even formed in our mother's womb. We can deal with the stress of our specialness by realizing and remembering that God won't leave us or forsake us in our purpose, so that it is not about being *qualified*, but it's about being *chosen* by a God who is able to do through us what we know we cannot do without God.

✚ *Another way that stress can be involved in our specialness is when we mistake "special" to mean that everything is always going to come up smelling like a rose. And when it doesn't—and it won't—our lives and our callings can take on a lot of stress.*

The specialness of our purpose can often cause us to feel a sense of entitlement, like we're not supposed to go through the trials and tribulations that other "less special" people have to go through. **In scripture, King David of Israel felt entitled enough to take Uriah's wife Bathsheba, and have Uriah killed on the battlefield, thinking there would be no consequences. However,**

the stress of the death of their conceived child was an emotional experience for David. The chosen disciples of Jesus, in their special role of being the inner circle of Jesus, lived with the constant stress of trying to understand the new paradigms of God's love that Jesus was trying to teach them, let alone the eventual knowledge that their own lives were in jeopardy because of their calling! That's stress too. In our present-day lives family tragedy, personal distress, business failure, physical and mental health issues, financial ruin—there is no end to the amount of clouds that can gather in one's life—either in spite of a special calling or because of a special calling—no matter what God has **specially purposed you to do**. But we can be reminded today that God sends life through the clouds that can hover over us. Life is in those clouds, because the rain—the nectar of life, what is necessary for growth—is in those clouds. No clouds, no rain. No rain, no possibilities of discovering new life, life we never knew existed, life we never knew we could make it to. So, one way to

look at the kind of stress hard times can bring is that God sends life through clouds, and new life through the rain, and renewed life through a storm. And through all of life's cloudiness, and rain, and storms, we are constantly in the process of becoming who and what we were specially purposed to be, by the God who is the author of the clouds, and the rain, and the storms—as well as the life that comes through them.

✚ *Finally, another way that we can experience stress because of our special calling is when we get impatient with the process that our purpose has to put us through, and try to run on ahead of God. That can produce a lot of stress in our life in relation to our purpose, as we make mistakes that are caused by our missing the timing of God. In scripture, Abraham and Sarah had to learn to be patient with God's timing, as the fulfillment of God's promise of offspring to them took a lot longer than either of them thought it would. In the book of Esther, Queen Esther of the kingdom of Persia—who was secretly a Jewish woman—had*

to discover her purpose in a hurry as she was persuaded to save the Jewish people in her kingdom from certain death and destruction. The twelve disciples themselves had lots of timing issues and impatient moments with what they were to do in the name of Jesus, and when they were to do it. Sometimes in our own present-day lives we want the training to be over, and we want to be in charge NOW. We want the time for school to be up, and we want to jump into the fray NOW. We believe we have a better idea, and we are ready to build it NOW. And sometimes its according to our OWN timing, and not the timing of God. How can we keep the stress of our specialness from derailing our purpose? By remembering that God's ways are not our ways; God's time is not our time; what God chooses is not always what we would choose. We must remember that God is not finished with us yet! God always has us under construction; always melting us, molding us, shaping us, filling us, and using us; helping us realize that we don't have to compete with others, because

their purpose is not my purpose. Their purpose is as unique, and as special, and as God-given as mine. They haven't been called to be anybody but them; and I haven't been called to be anybody but me. Being who you authentically are can help to reduce your stress. It's stressful trying to be someone who you are not.

Beloved, we are all special in God's sight, God's heart, God's plan, because we all are known by God, and have a pre-natal purpose which is essential to God's constantly unfolding plan. Israel was a special part of that plan; Jesus was a special part of that plan; the disciples that Jesus chose were a special part of that plan; and you and I are a part of that plan. There may be stress caused in our lives as we learn how to discern and live out our God-given calling and purpose, but as we remember that God is able; God is a very present help in times of clouds and trouble; and God's time is better than our time, the stress of our specialness—in the sight of God as well as in the sight of the world—can be greatly reduced.

