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by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)
[patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.](mailto:patrickjmarrin@gmail.com)

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“Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” Matthew 10:8).

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Ex 19:2-6a](#); [Ps 100](#); [Romans 5:6-11](#); [Matthew 9:36—10:8](#)

Hidden in plain view in the story of our salvation is the mystery of grace. God acts freely to choose us, accompany us, love us and save us, not because we are worthy but because God is love.

Today’s three readings highlight this central theme. In Exodus 19, Moses comes down from meeting God on the mountain and tells the Hebrew slaves fleeing from

Egypt that God freely chose to rescue them and make them his people because God loves them. Despite this, they will prolong their way across the desert, erect a golden calf to worship, complain about food and water and fearfully resist entering the Promised Land.

St. Paul tells his converts in Rome that God is saving them not because they are worthy, godly or righteous but because God loves them. Proof of this is that Christ was sent to save them when they were enemies. This is the Good News: Jesus died for us when we were still sinners.

Matthew names Jesus' Apostles. They prove to be flawed men who will resist his teaching, quarrel over personal status, abandon him in crisis and refuse the news of his Resurrection. Peter is a boastful coward, James and John are hotheads who get their mother to ask Jesus for special treatment. Matthew was a hated tax gatherer, Thomas has his doubts, Simon is a zealot and Judas Iscariot will betray Jesus for money. Why he selects them to be his closest companions can only be explained by love and a vision of their potential roles after conversion.

The Gospel scene may actually be a low point in Jesus' ministry. A huge crowd of desperate, forlorn people have followed Jesus into the wilderness. He is moved to pity by how lost and abandoned they are, like sheep without a shepherd. Yet, he sees in them a ripe harvest and tells his ragtag disciples to ask God for laborers to care for them. Jesus gives them authority to drive out unclean spirits, to heal diseases, even to raise the dead, for, as he says, the reign of God is at hand. Take hold of the grace being poured out and give it away. They have received that grace, so share it with others. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Let God's unconditional love flow through you.

This biblical pattern of human inadequacy and weakness meeting God's infinite love is our pattern today. Pope Francis has devoted his papacy to renewing the church with the theme of mercy. He calls himself a sinner and refuses to pass judgment on others who are searching for God. He proposes opening church governance with the model of synodality, all the baptized walking together and listening to each other's stories and to the Holy Spirit. Something new must happen if the church is to attract and hold its young people. The church must open itself to every gift, especially the genius of women, the voice of the poor, the cry of the rejected, wounded and abused.

Grace abounds where people are willing to let it pass freely through them to others - no more closed doors, privileged elites and special access. Only a church in which all are welcomed, listened to and loved will reveal the God of infinite love and unconditional mercy. The harvest is ripe and waiting. We must not simply ask for but *be* the laborers God will send to gather everyone who is seeking the reign of God.