

Do you ever wish someone would come along and do something to fix the problems we see?

There was once a nine-year-old kid sitting at his desk and all of a sudden, a puddle appeared between his feet and the front of his pants were wet. He silently panicked because he cannot possibly imagine how this has happened. It's never happened before, and he knows that when the other kids find out he will never hear the end of it.

The boy believes his heart is going to stop. He puts his head down and prays this prayer, "Dear God, this is an emergency! I need help now! Five minutes from now I'm dead meat."

He looks up from his prayer and the teacher is coming with a look in her eyes that says he has been discovered. As the teacher is walking toward him, a classmate named Susie is carrying a goldfish bowl that is filled with water. Susie trips in front of the teacher and inexplicably dumps the bowl of water in the boy's lap. The boy pretends to be angry, but all the while is saying to himself, "Thank you, Lord! Thank you, Lord!"

Now all of a sudden, instead of being the object of ridicule, the boy is the object of sympathy. The teacher rushes him downstairs and gives him gym shorts to put on while his pants dry out. All the other children are on their hands and knees cleaning up around his desk. The sympathy is wonderful.

But as life would have it, the ridicule that should have been his has been transferred to someone else - Susie. She tries to help, but they tell her to get out. You've done enough, you klutz!"

Finally, at the end of the day, as they are waiting for the bus, the boy walks over to Susie and whispers, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Susie whispers back, "I wet my pants once too."

Susie saw a need and she took action to fix it and make a difference. I love that story

In our scripture for today, Jesus is seeing a need. He sees people who are hurting, struggling with disease and other problems. He sees people who are struggling so much, they don't know where to turn. He is doing what he can. But it must have felt overwhelming, like water that keeps coming and never stops running. So he turned to his disciples and said, "Let's pray to ask God to send help to meet these needs."

Then, he turns to his disciples, and gives them authority to make a difference, to touch, to offer hope and healing. And he sends them out to be the hands and feet for God, to make a difference in that world. He sends them out to the people who are lost and hurting. He sends them out to those who are in Israel, who are in need.

Sometimes as a pastor, I hear people say to me, "We need to not be so involved in missions far away. We need to make a difference right here in our community."

It is as if to say, "Let's just take care of our own."

For me, it has always been a both/and. We need to be involved in missions far away. But we need to be involved in missions and ministry right here in our backyard too.

Right now the flood waters have overwhelmed so much of Wisconsin. What can we do? What are you willing to do to make a difference to people who are hurting in our community, in our state? Are you willing to help move sandbags? Are you willing to have a prayer with someone? Are you willing to clean and help rebuild?

Jesus, in this passage is challenging us to see the needs right here, right around us. He is challenging us to make ourselves available in the name of God to touch those needs and offer hope and grace to others.

For when we do, it makes a difference. The love that it shows, changes lives. Are you willing to let God's love be shown through you?

Some years ago, on a hot summer day in South Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt as he went. He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore.

His father, working in the yard, saw the two as they got closer and closer together. In utter fear, he ran toward the water, yelling to his son as loudly as he could.

Hearing his voice, the little boy became alarmed and made a U-turn to swim to his father. It was too late. Just as he reached his father, the alligator reached him.

From the dock, the father grabbed his little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. That began an incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the father, but the father was much too passionate to let go.

A farmer happened to drive by, heard his screams, raced from his truck, took aim and shot the alligator.

Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred by the vicious attack

of the animal. And, on his arms, were deep scratches where his father's fingernails dug into his flesh in his effort to hang on to the son he loved.

The newspaper reporter, who interviewed the boy after the trauma, asked if he would show him his scars. The boy lifted his pant legs. And then, with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, 'But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my Dad wouldn't let go.'

Love changes lives. God's love, living through us, to see a need and work toward making a difference changes lives. May we learn to respond to at least one need this next week, to share God's love for those around us.

Amen.