

“Breathing Under Water: Step 12 What Comes Around Must Go Around”
Matthew 10:5-14

We have reached Step 12 on this journey through the 12 Steps of AA with Richard Rohr’s book *Breathing Under Water*. Each step has its own challenge for us as we grow and bring healing to ourselves and to our world. This step challenges us to share our faith with others. This step is, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” Carrying the message sounds a lot like what Jesus commissioned the disciples to do. This makes a lot of us nervous because when it comes to sharing the message, we have to overcome the narrow ways many Christians have defined “sharing the message.” We tend to imagine people who knock on doors or tell you to turn your life over to Jesus. They are often people who try to make you believe like they do in order to be saved from hell. These kinds of tactics often turn people off and make us leery of doing the same to others. The big problem with such sharing of the message is that it reduces faith to a moral and belief system that is exclusive and rigid.

In the movie “Forrest Gump,” we see a negative reaction to such evangelism by Lieutenant Dan who had lost his legs in the war in Vietnam and was angry with life and with God. That kind of shallow sharing of the message missed the real pain of his life. Here is a clip of him talking to his friend Forrest Gump about it. It is one of my favorite clips in the movie:

<https://youtu.be/ZOUUCFiWzpc>

So how do we share the message of God’s love in a genuine and faithful manner? I think to answer this question, we must first engage the why behind it? Why are we invited to share the message? The answer for AA and for the followers of Jesus is the same: for the healing of the world, but especially for the sake of our own healing. If we want to be healed, we have to go out and serve and share our healing with others without expectations of success. In AA, the need for healing is clear, but if we look at our world and our relationships, we know that healing is needed for everyone. Here is a quote from Anne Lamott about the messes of our lives: “When I was a child, I thought grown-ups and teachers knew the truth...It took years for me to discover that the first step in finding out the truth is to begin unlearning almost everything adults had taught me...Their main pitch was that achievement equaled happiness...when all you had to do was study rock stars, or movie stars, or them, to see that they were mostly miserable. They were all running around in mazes like everyone **else**.”

The reason for sharing the message of God’s healing and love with others in our lives is for the sake of our continued healing and the healing the world. If we do not share our experiences of God’s healing and grace, we don’t get to grow in them. With this goal in mind, we are freed from having to convert people into our own belief systems and religious practices. It is about showing the path of love as we have experienced it. That is why what we share is not some objective truth about God and faith. We share what we ourselves had experienced.

If we look at the example of Jesus in sending out the disciples to share his message, we will find a very similar pattern. In our scripture story for today, Jesus sends out the twelve to share his message and to bring healing to the world. Let's listen to the story together (Read Matthew 10:5-14).

Jesus sent his disciples out to continue his ministry of healing and to do it in the same way he did it. He sent them out to rely on the hospitality and generosity of others. They were not to force themselves on others. They were also limited at first to the people of their own religion because this was early on in their ministry. Sharing the message had to be solely focused on helping people get out of the messes and sufferings they found themselves in whether it was caused by them or by their circumstances. It was not about morality or religious conviction. It was about relationships and sharing one's personal awakening, or experiences of healing. Jesus commissioned his followers by sharing in his style of radical ministry. He sent them to live as he lived, being hosted by sympathetic locals, living very simply. They were to do as Jesus did: proclaiming the reign of God and living it by healings and exorcisms and setting the oppressed free. They were to be bearers of the good news in word and deed. What is interesting in this story is that Jesus sent them out early on in their ministry. They had not graduated from his ministry training yet. They had not really figured out their own stuff yet! They were still struggling to really understand his message and that is why Jesus sent them out. Nothing he could have said or done would have helped them be truly prepared for ministry or for relying on God's power in their lives like being out in the field. Every professional knows that. You can study or train to be a lawyer, an accountant, a driver, or a teacher, but unless you get to put your learning into practice, none of it really connects. That is what Jesus was hoping to help his disciples experience from the beginning of his ministry with them. Sharing their experiences of God's love with being attached to success was an essential part of their own growth.

The path of healing and sharing in AA is very similar because the teaching is that you can't help others by criticizing them. You can't help by trying to persuade someone into your way of thinking. Don't refer to this book or any other resource, The Big Book says. Don't use spiritual jargon – use everyday words. Don't talk about theological terms or concepts or even what church tradition you belong to – that puts the focus on something other than God. Instead, when the time is right, and you'll know it, the book says, simply and truthfully tell the person you are trying to help exactly what happened to you. When God touches your life and brings you healing, you are invited to share that with others who are seeking healing and whom God puts on your path.

Here are a few key points to summarize the work of this step and to follow the path of Christ of healing for each of us.

1. Only share from your own awakening: What heals the world is sharing what has healed you. The power of what you share comes from your specific story of awakening to God's presence in your life. God is already in other people's lives and hearts. We just need to help each other see that. This is not about convincing someone to believe like you do. It is about sharing how God is transforming your life.

2. **This Is Not Optional:** If we want to grow deeper in our own healing, we have to step outside of ourselves. Richard Rohr writes, “Step 12 found a way to expose and transform that pathological adolescence by telling us early on that we must serve others. It is not an option, not something we might eventually be ‘called’ to after thirty-five religious retreats and fifty years of church services; it is not something we do when we get our act together. No, we do not truly comprehend any spiritual thing until we ourselves give it away. Spiritual gifts increase only by ‘using’ them...It is a karmic law of in and out.”
3. **Healing Is the Focus:** Addiction is not a moral failure or weakness. There is a stigma attached to it because of the social belief that people who are addicted to substances lack willpower or are cowardly in facing the challenges of life. This is still going on in our world today. Think about the recent struggle of GCASA in our community trying to find a building to house a social program for people in recovery. The backlash was based in people’s fears of people in recovery. Instead of finding ways to help them, they wanted to avoid having them in their neighborhood. Rohr writes, “Addiction is a spiritual disease, a disease of the soul, an illness resulting from longing, frustrated desire, and deep dissatisfaction -which is ironically the necessary beginning of any spiritual path...Addiction emerges out of a lack of inner experience of intimacy with oneself, with God, with life, and with the moment.”

Step 12 and Jesus challenge us to focus on love and care for others in personal ways. This often defies our society’s obsession with the ego and its needs for power, control, and affection. I would like to end with a clip from Anne Lamott about her journey to healing and becoming sober: <https://youtu.be/5kjypuosD78>

What did you hear in her witness? What spoke to you?

Take a few moments to remember someone who shared with you their own experience of healing and thus inspired you to get on the path of such healing...(sharing).

That is the power of such a witness. May we always have the courage to share this message of healing and love! Amen.