

June 14th, 2020

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Milan, WI

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Edgar, WI

Text: Matthew 9:35-10:20

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Gospel reading today from Matthew 9 and 10 relates several important firsts in Jesus' earthly ministry: The selection of the Twelve and the first missionary assignment for Jesus' Apostles. Prior to this we read only that Jesus had disciples, an unspecified number of followers who were starting to learn from Him. Some He called by name and others came to Him. But here Jesus specifically sets apart the Twelve to be His "apostles", a word which literally means "one who is sent". It doesn't mean simply messenger, like the mailman, but more of a special delegate, like an ambassador. Someone who carries the authority of another. That is exactly what the Apostles did; they carried the authority of Jesus as an extension of His own divine authority. They did not do whatever they wanted to do. Our Lord gave them the authority to preach the Kingdom of God, to heal the sick, raise the dead and to cast out demons, all things that He Himself did. As it says in verse 36, "**When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**" He came to be their Shepherd and to aid in this task He appointed under-shepherds to carry His mercy to those who were lost and helpless.

The missionary activity of the Apostles is in some ways unique, just like the ministry of Jesus. We cannot recreate it because we have not been giving the authority to do so. We cannot and should not try to apply these unique historical events to ourselves. But the broader evangelistic task of the Church does apply to all Christians for all are charged to confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and to love our neighbors in truth and deed. It's really a matter of vocation. The vocation of Apostle doesn't exist anymore. But the vocations of husband, mother, daughter, co-worker, citizen and dozens more do exist and those are the ones we should be concerned about.

That might help clear up any confusion about our Lord's command in verses 5-6; "**Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" This is not a general instruction for all Christians, obviously, but only applied to the Apostles at that specific time. Jesus even hinted that it was a limited instruction later on when He said "**you will be dragged before governors and kings for My sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.**" (v.18) So later on they would be sent out to evangelize all the nations, including before foreign kings and governors. But at this time they had a limited set of marching orders: Go only "**to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**".

With that in context, it makes Jesus' warning about their reception even more alarming. He said to them, "**if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or**

town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” (v.14-15) Who is it that would not receive the joyous announcement of the arrival of the Messiah? The house of Israel. Many of the same Jews whom claimed to be waiting for the Christ would reject Him. And those who rejected Jesus’ ambassadors, His Apostles, also rejected the one who sent them. They didn’t just reject the Son but also the Father. And in another Trinitarian teaching moment, He also tells them about the work of the Holy Spirit in their ministry, saying **“do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”** (v.19-20)

So parts of our reading do not apply to us because we are not the Apostles, but other parts do. As under-shepherds of Christ all pastors share the same charge to care for the flock of God, not seeking our own will but doing those specific things that Christ commanded. Preaching God’s Word, administering His Sacraments, sharing mercy and love with all. Not inventing new things for the Church to be about, not seeking to change the world into a false utopia. What Jesus has commanded is enough... and it is no easy task. Some of that applies to you as well, specifically the sharing of God’s mercy and His Gospel. What should you, as Christian, be doing day in and day out? The same things Christians have been doing for two thousand years: Sharing the Good News to those who are broken and mourning, who despair of being too sinful to ever receive God’s forgiveness.

There is no one who is beyond the grace of Christ. That is what St. Paul was telling the church in Rome. He said **“while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly”** (v.6). While we were still enemies of God... that is why Christ Jesus came to earth. Not because we deserved God’s blessing, but because we so desperately need it. That is what the majority of the Jews in Israel couldn’t accept: That they were sinners who needed to be saved. This is also the same response of most people today: They say they don’t need saving, even though God clearly says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They lack both humility and a right knowledge of themselves. God comforts the contrite and lifts up the broken-hearted. All who turn to Him in repentance will be received as sons and daughters of the Most High, their sins removed as far as the east is from the west. We don’t need to pretend and we don’t need to justify ourselves. The Son of God came despite our weaknesses to justify us with His righteousness.

Once you were harassed and helpless, wandering without a shepherd, but now the Good Shepherd has given Himself for you, to wash you whiter than snow and take you for His own possession. The peace of God now rests on you because God keeps His promises and He will never forsake His own.

In the name Jesus, amen.

Rev. Schopp