

The Sent Ones

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Year A: Pentecost 3: Matthew 9:35-10:23 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. ⁹Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²²and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures

to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. *The Gospel of our Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.*

Jesus has need of us. We are the sent ones to go and tell. Go and show. Go and be God's presence in a world of lost and wandering sheep.

This week at Vacation Bible School was amazing on several levels. It was incredible to see over seventy pre-schoolers and elementary children attend VBS; most of whom do not have a church home. I prayed that as these children went home each day singing crazy songs about God, that their parents might be moved to take them to church – any church – on a weekend.

It was amazing to see our 15 middle school and high school youth volunteering their time to hang out with pre-schoolers and elementary children. From King of Glory, we had Lorelei and Camilla Karspeck each with a separate group of kids. These youth were patient and kind. They learned quickly how to encourage and how to re-direct busy hands and busy mouths.

Finally, it was fabulous to have four college and post-college age young adults leading VBS each day. God worked in each of their lives to get them to this point, to this summer experience, of teaching like Jesus did, about God's love and the gifts of the Spirit.

One morning, I asked one of the teenagers when they were going to go to Sky Ranch and be a staff counselor? The reply came without hesitation. "As soon as I'm old enough!"

As soon as age allows, this teenager wants to go and work on staff at Sky Ranch. But reality is, this student and each youth there who helped this week, has already moved from disciple to apostle.

Take a quick look in your bulletins. In chapter 9 verse 37 and 38, Jesus followers are described as 'disciples.' What does a disciple do? They learn. Specifically, they learn from the teacher.

Yet after Jesus has chosen the twelve, note that in chapter 10 verse 2, these twelve have a new description. They are now listed as the "twelve apostles." The word apostle, means, "sent out". These are the sent-out ones. Jesus has taught them, now they have a new job description. They are being sent out by the teacher.

As N.T. Wright says, “Up until this moment, Jesus’ disciples have been passengers in the car and he’s been doing all the driving. They have been astonished at why they’ve seen, but he’s made all the decisions....now he’s telling them to go off and do it themselves.You want us to do it? By ourselves?” (N.T. Wright. *Matthew for Everyone*. Part 1. Chapters 1-15. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. 2004. Pg. 111.)

Remember how it felt to move from being a student driver to being a driver? We all had to make the shift from learner mode to driving mode. We got sent out to get groceries for mom, or pick up a sibling, or get ourselves to our new jobs. It’s a change of heart, of mind and of responsibility.

“Yes!” Jesus says. “Because there is a mighty harvest out there and I need more laborers. Now, it’s your turn.”

You see, Jesus’ heart was grieved as He watched the increasing crowds around Him. They were like ‘sheep without a shepherd’. This phrase is an Old Testament phrase indicating that the people of ancient Israel didn’t have a king or prophet to look after them. Jesus’ heart hurt that His fellow Jewish leaders, weren’t leading. They weren’t tending to the people. The time had come for new leaders to take the reigns.

There are many people who are still like sheep without a shepherd. People are lonely, feeling desperate and anxious. They don’t have a church home to hear about God who loves them or friends who will tell them.

This passage very clearly indicates that Jesus needs you and me. He says, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”

Even among disappointed church goers, Jesus needs us. I’m not talking about sheep stealing – taking members from other churches. But instead, being transparent and honest about our Lutheran experience. I won’t get the story exactly right, but Bishop Gonia told a story about a man who had been a member in a main-line denomination for years. Discouraged, he and Bishop had a conversation. Bishop Jim described our Lutheran theology about being saved by grace, being both sinners and saints, living as both-and people in an either-or world. This gentleman suddenly exclaimed, “Where have you Lutherans been all my life?!”

You and I are the sent-ones. Yes, there are times we’ve had of sitting at Jesus’ feet learning and listening to His teachings. In fact, we still need those times to re-fill,

re-fresh and re-charge. Yet, we are Jesus' apostles. We are the sent-ones...to go into God's world and share the Gospel.

These are times to not only act as Jesus acted...to be kind, loving and caring, but to use words as well. This is "Show and Tell". When we show up with the casserole at the sick neighbor's door, we say, "God loves you and so do I." It's a both-and. As Amy-Jill Levine says, "You Christians are great at being kind. But you're not great at telling people why you care!"

Many of God's children are lost. They need concrete arms around them, and they need concrete words spoken to them. In this world that allows for so many options, where truth is decided upon individually, people need to hear there is one truth, one God, one faith where they can land and stand.

Here's some encouragement for us, if we are feeling anxious about the task. In this Matthew text – later Jesus will change the directions – but here, Chapter 9, Jesus' says, "Go and preach only to the Jews, not the Gentiles." Basically, He restricts them to Galilee. Now I am asking us to go and be the sent ones – the light to the world – to people who don't believe in Jesus; Gentiles. But for the sake of this sermon, I'm asking us to stay right here at home. The mission field isn't over in a third world country. It hasn't been for a long time. It's right here at home.

God is sending us to the "nones." That's right. The "nones." For years, the Pew Research Center has polled Americans about their religious beliefs or lack there-of. In 2021, it was reported that Christians are still in the majority in the United States at 63%. But the second highest category is the 'nones': people who have no religious affiliation. Three in ten adults report having no attachment to any religious denomination or faith. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated>)

We Lutherans have also kept data. Do you know how often, we Lutherans invite someone to church? About once in 67.5 years. I know without a doubt, how much faith means to each of us. The Lord is asking us to show and tell. We are the sent ones to the lost sheep. Let's do it!

Thanks be to God. Amen.