

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Matthew 9:35 - 10:8 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

10:1 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (NIV2011)

"Join Jesus on His Mission"

The first day of middle school was absolute chaos. Until you stopped an older neighbor who helped you navigate through the school to get from your locker to your home room and around the building to all your classes. You were satisfied with just showing up for work and putting in your hours every day. Until the owner took you aside one day and told you about the potential she saw in you. She helped you see how far you could go with the right guidance and determination and a little help. You didn't have a lot of role models growing up. More people who let you down, who either didn't care or tried to take advantage of you. So you always gravitated toward your grandfather. There was just this quiet strength in him. Not a perfect man. But someone determined to do his best for the people who depended on him.

Sometimes you just need someone to take an interest in you. Invest in you. Believe in you. And then be there for you through the ups and downs to help you toward a major goal. That's the idea behind graduation coaches. So many factors get in the way of students who fail to graduate. Most of them aren't purely academic. Rough family situations. Tricky home life. Real problems that make students just feel like packing it in and giving up. So graduation coaches commit to helping students get to the graduation finish line. They help show them the importance of getting that diploma. They help the students set goals, then check in regularly to offer encouragement and help them stay focused on those goals.

Sometimes you just need someone to join with you. Show you how it's done. Help you do what you already know is important.

When Jesus sends out disciples, he goes with them. Maybe not physically, holding their hands. But Jesus shows his heart for people. He models what it means to care about souls. Then he deputizes disciples to work with him to extend the reach of his kingdom. And that isn't just true for those disciples 2,000 years ago in Israel. It's true for disciples today too. Jesus reaches our hearts. Then Jesus invites us to join him on his mission.

One helpful part of encouraging students is to show them what is possible when they stay in school. So business leaders and government officials and representatives from the non-profit sector explain what they do for a living. They tell how they are able to impact other people and make a difference. This section from Matthew chapters nine and ten begins with Jesus going out on his mission. Here's a summary of Jesus' ministry activities: **"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."** (Matthew 9:35)

Jesus has a goal. Jesus has a purpose. He is out to make the ultimate difference in the lives of the people all around him. He is motivated by a true care and concern for them: **"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** (Matthew 9:36) Jesus is moved at the deepest levels of his being. He sees people who are literally beaten up by life. Not just the construction worker who has to push around hot asphalt on a 97 degree day or a grocery store clerk with bags under her eyes. People who just try to go through life and get ripped by their dangerous surroundings. Exhausted just trying to take care of their families and stay safe. People who want to turn off the news, but just don't feel like they can. Who are just ready for this whole pandemic to be over, but are now starting to worry if it will get worse before it gets better. People who have enough tension in their personal lives, but then start thinking about racism and inequality and it just gets their blood boiling. People who are afraid to ask what's next, what else could go wrong.

In the middle of this chaos and confusion, Jesus sees souls. Souls who need him. Souls who have deeper needs than medicine. Deeper hurts to be healed than taking a few tablets will solve. Jesus sees helpless, at risk people. People who need a shepherd. And so Jesus responds with compassion. Not just sympathy. Not even mercy. But moved deep down inside so he is willing to do whatever he can to relieve and remove those sufferings.

And this is where Jesus invites you to join him. He opens the eyes of God's people to see what he is doing on his mission. Jesus brings you along on his mission. Jesus says to his disciples: **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** (Matthew 9:37,38) This is probably the point where we need to remember that prayer as Jesus teaches it is powerful, but it's also dangerous.

Jesus opens our eyes to see a need and then respond in prayer. He helps us notice what's not right with our world, and then how God can bring his healing and compassion to souls.

See and take action but taking your concerns to God in prayer. And when it comes to the instability and uncertainty we see in our world, Jesus opens the eyes of his people to see deeper, spiritual needs. Our prayers unite us in God's concern for the lost and scattered sheep in our world. Prayer allows us to join with God in heart and mind and will. Then Jesus invites us to be the answer to our own prayers.

Prayer is the first step to take when we realize an opening for God to act. But prayer is not a substitute for action for our own action. In God's amazing power, he is moved by prayer to act and respond. In God's amazing grace, he chooses to use his people as his instruments to bring action and response into this world. Don't let this keep you from praying. Pray boldly and courageously and persistently just like Jesus teaches. But realize that whenever you pray for unbelievers or those who are suffering or the many people struggling with disease or even for your own enemies, realize that God is opening up your heart to see how he could be using you. How God could use you to reach out to your enemies. How God could put you in a place to support someone who is struggling. How God can alleviate pain and be a source of comfort. How God can use you to bring the good news of the kingdom to someone who isn't yet a believer in Jesus. And not even praying that it might happen all by itself. Actually praying that you want God to use you. That you want to be God's instrument. That you want to be that disciple to bring someone into the arms of the Good Shepherd.

Prayer moves you from seeing the mission of Jesus and responding, to taking that mission to heart and making it your own. To joining Jesus on his mission. Making his mission your mission. Jesus uses the picture of a harvest that is ripe. Jesus is saying that people are like a crop out in a field. They need attention. There can be no delay. If crops aren't harvested in time, the entire crop could go to waste. Harvest also helps us see God has planted and watered and caused to grow. Now the work left to be done is simply gathering in. But there is need of action. Urgent need.

But then it sinks in. Joining Jesus on his mission is intimidating. After all, I don't have the Bible memorized. I don't even have all the doctrines from the Lutheran Confessions straight in my own head. I am still a novice. I still have so much to learn. Now add to that the current complications. A global pandemic has thrown everything off. We can't interact on a person to person level the way we feel most comfortable. And let's address the elephant in the room. We have an uncertain future for our congregation. We don't know what is going to happen next month, much less next year. How can we formulate plans and organize events to reach people?

Here's what we need to remember. The world is changing, but the mission hasn't. Our congregation will be different, but our Savior is the same. And there are still needs out there. People are lost and frightened, harassed and helpless. In need of the one Shepherd. We just need to reevaluate the opportunities God has given us.

This past week I was talking with a friend about the changing nature of the church's mission. He simplified things about when we reach people with the good news of Jesus: Death, Divorce, and Displacement. Not street parties complete with balloons and pony rides or special holidays with amazing music inside our church. But when people experience loss

and suffering. When they are left hurting and their whole world is turned upside down. When everything that had made them comfortable before is called into question. When they are looking for answers.

Joining Jesus on his mission simply means Jesus calls you to do for others what he has already done for you. Pray daily for lost sheep. Recognize the lost sheep. It doesn't have to be sickness and disease or unclean spirits and demon possession. It could simply be an awareness that things are not the way God intends them to be in our world. Recognizing that we all have deeper heart issues than can be seen on the surface. That souls need a better cure than just to offer the platitudes and cliches of aspirin when someone needs chemotherapy.

Joining Jesus on his mission means Jesus doesn't put all the burden on you. Everything Jesus asks his disciples to do, he empowers them to do. Disciples are only extending what Jesus has already done. Jesus summarizes your mission this way: **"Freely you have received; freely give."** (Matthew 10:8) Your life is a Jesus-shaped ministry. Sent by Jesus. Conduct your mission powered by Jesus. Your work is shaped by Jesus' own ministry. Everything you do revolves around the message of Jesus. It all adds up to put Jesus at work. Disciples of Jesus carry out the mission of Jesus. We are an extension of Jesus' own ministry. Joining Jesus is all about what Jesus is doing through you.

Graduation coaches help at risk students set up a graduation plan with goals to achieve their plans. They help students develop problem solving strategies. Coaches meet with the students at least once each month and check in at least once every week to build positive relationships and encourage students to meet their goals and graduate.

The goal for God's people is to get others into God's kingdom. Jesus rules in human hearts with his grace. He conquers each heart's greatest enemies by his compassion that led him to the cross. Jesus gives peace to souls feeling helpless and harassed. Jesus brings healing to those torn and wearied by life.

Already now, this kingdom is near. It is right at hand. Right now we don't have an existence free from struggles and conflict. But we have peace with Jesus. We have forgiveness through his life and sacrifice. We have the commitment of Christ's compassion in every moment of our lives. God's people are gifted to be under the compassionate care of the Good Shepherd and privileged to be sent out with his soul-saving authority. Disciples model our lives after his mission of compassion. We are blessed to join Jesus on his mission. Amen.