

Matthew 9:35-10:8 Pastor Bill Uetricht Pentecost 2 6/15/20

When I lived in Toledo, I took voice lessons from Jean Holden, one of Toledo's best jazz singers. Jean emphasized in her voice instruction the importance of opening the mouth and lowering the jaw when singing. The point of such action was to elongate the vowel sounds and thus eliminate pitch problems. Now a few people at Peace, the church I served in Toledo, were horrified when I told them about this. They thought I opened my mouth far enough. They were fearful of how loud I would become, if I opened my mouth further. Jean told me, though, that this is just what good singers do. They open their mouths. They elongate the vowels.

Sometimes when you are something, there are things you do because you are that something or someone. It's just a part of who you are. Today we meet the apostles of Jesus. The word apostle comes from a Greek word meaning "to send." Apostles are the "sent ones." Jesus chose them, called them, and then he sent them. To be an apostle is to be sent.

The apostles are like Jesus. He was sent. Matthew, in one of his classic summary statements, says that Jesus went all about the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Jesus was sent. "Jesus was sent to bring health to the ailing; Jesus was sent with good news for the poor." (Song "Jesus was Sent by John Ylvisaker) To be Jesus is to be sent. To be an apostle is to be *sent*. That is just who apostles are. They are *sent* ones.

Now, it's worth your while paying attention to who the sent ones are. The first in the list, and this tells you something about Matthew, is Peter. Peter is a big deal to Matthew. In other gospels, Peter often comes across as a real bumbling dufus. In Matthew, he is the head of the church. He is the one who rightfully calls Jesus "the Christ." Matthew is friendlier to the developing church in Jerusalem and its

leaders than are the other gospel writers. Peter gets good press in Matthew. He is the first in the list. The second is none other than *Peter's* brother. Matthew loves Peter.

Yet, the list doesn't include simply the Jerusalem big wigs. Also in the list is Matthew, the tax collector, perhaps the one for whom the gospel is named. As you know, I am sure, a tax collector was a part of the Roman machine, a hated collaborator with the powers of oppression. This hated one is included.

And also in the list is Simon, the Cananaean, or as he is labeled in the other gospels, Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were the ones who worked for the violent overthrow of the Roman government. Well, there's a great Thanksgiving dinner. A representative of the Roman establishment sitting next to one who wants to destroy it.

Also the one who will show up at the Thanksgiving dinner is Judas, "the one who betrayed him." It's obvious that the gospel of Matthew was written well after the events described in it. In this verse we get a foreshadowing of the ending of the story long before we get there. You would think that Jesus would have had a little more sense than to call someone who is eventually going to turn his back on him.

It's a wild bunch that Jesus calls and sends. Yep! Nothing's really changed. He's still calling and sending a wild bunch of folks. He's calling and sending the ones who seem to have a little authority and maybe a good pedigree. He's calling the ones connected to power and those who despise the power brokers. He's calling working people, fisherman, they are labeled. He calls betrayers, ones whose very life will cry out for forgiveness. He calls and sends ordinary folks, broken folks, hurt and suffering folks, dissatisfied folks, angry folks, folks with an agenda, folks with a past, folks other people probably wouldn't select. The Thanksgiving holiday of Jesus is really wild. But note, Jesus

doesn't keep this wild bunch at the table long. Right away, he sends them. To be an apostle is to be sent.

Interestingly enough, at least here in Matthew, where Jesus sends them is the same places where he has been. They aren't, at least initially, to go far and wide. They aren't to go among the Gentiles, the nations, the Samaritans, the hated enemies of the Judeans. No, they are to go to their own places, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Sometimes where we are being sent is a lot closer to home than we ever realized. It may be romantic to think that we are being sent all over the place. Frankly, these days that is not very practical, as we are being encouraged to stay as close to home as possible. But even in non-quarantined times, where we are being sent may not be that far away. It may look more like home that we want it to.

During this time as we encounter the consequences of racism in our land, it might be worth white people's while not only to open themselves up to the experiences of black folks, having real and honest conversations with them about those experiences. But it also would be worth white folks' while spending time in conversation with one another about these matters. We've got some cleaning up to do in our own houses. I learned that about the little area where I grew up in northern Cincinnati. That area was built upon the back of racism. The community was formed out of governmental policies and real estate strategies that intentionally kept black folks out. That community needs to tell the truth to itself about its past. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be sent, sometimes just down the street, sometimes in your own home, sometimes in your own closets.

Wherever we are sent, what sends us is what sent Jesus. Matthew tells us that "when [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had *compassion* for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." The Greek word for "compassion" is

related to the word for bowels. Jesus is moved in his guts by what he is seeing. His people are lacking direction; they are without good leadership. Their lives are calling out for a response from him.

Compassion, gut-wrenching compassion is what sends Jesus' disciples. It is what is sending us. People are harassed by unclean spirits, call them larger-than-life powers or systems that denigrate their lives. People are weakened by sickness, threatened by death. They are cast off from other people because of who they are or what they have done. Ones sent by Jesus can't help but be moved in their guts by the needs of hurting humanity. It's just what people sent by Jesus experience. Compassion is what sends us. And compassion is what we do!

Emil Brunner once said: "The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith." To be the church, to be disciples is to be sent. The calling in your life is not simply to *believe* something about Jesus. Mission is not something that the strongly committed do. The church is mission. The church is compassion.

The church is a called and sent community for the sake of compassion, the compassion of God. What the cross of Jesus tells us about God is that God doesn't stay at a distance from human pain. God is moved in God's guts and experiences human harassment and helplessness. To follow Jesus isn't to complete a check-list of beliefs which somehow gives you a place in heaven. To follow Jesus is a lifestyle. It to saturate yourself in the compassion of God. Compassion is just what we who are sent by Jesus do.