

Written Copy: Matthew 10:16-20 Our Call to be Christ's Ministers

Proper 6-2nd Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, June 14th, 2020

Text: Matthew 10:16-20

¹⁶ "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, 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. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Exegetical Statement

Jesus is continuing His missionary ministry He began after returning from the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. He is proclaiming the Gospel Message that the reign of God has come in Him. He is proving this by healing every incurable disease, casting out demons, and performing other miraculous signs. As He ministers, He sees the great need that the people of Israel have, both physical and spiritual. And the number of those in need moves Him to encourage His disciples to petition the Father for help in ministering to all of them. Then, in response to that petition, as the Word of God made flesh, He answers that petition by selecting Twelve from those following Him. He authorizes and empowers them to be an extension of the ministry He had been doing. These Twelve Disciples thus empowered are introduced, and called "apostles": those specially authorized and sent to do His ministry. He charges them at this time to go to the cities and small towns of Israel only. They are to preach His Gospel Message and do the miraculous work He has been doing. They are not to gather unto themselves money or provisions while on the road but be supplied by those who hear their message and are moved to help. Those who refuse them and thereby refuse the Gospel message that is from Jesus Himself have chosen their own eternal fate. To demonstrate this fact the Disciples are to shake the dirt from their sandals. Jesus tells them that God's peace will not rest on these. Jesus warns that they need to be aware of their surroundings, that shrewd and evil men, working as disciples of Satan, will oppose them and try to trick them. But they are not to retaliate or stoop to underhanded methods but remain as innocent and sinless as sacrificial dove. While they go out as sheep among wolves their Good Shepherd will protect them and enable them to do His ministry. Opposition and persecution will come, but it will serve the purpose of bringing them before rulers and kings in order to be Gospel witnesses by word and action. When the time comes to speak, they shouldn't be frozen with fear, but know that the Holy Spirit will be speaking from within them and through them.

Focus Statement:

Even when we don't see or refuse to see the need around us, Jesus sees and knows. His great love, shown to all men when He willingly suffered and died for those who stood opposed to Him, extends to people of all races, ethnic origins, and colors. All are undeserving of His love and salvation and yet all are saved by grace through faith. He has called His Church to be ministers of this Gospel to those He brings alongside them.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can see the call in this Gospel Lesson as a charge only for the Apostles of Jesus' day or those called as missionaries now. Because of the great need around us, our feeling that we lack the ability to help, and our sinful hearts that see color and race instead of need, we ignore the call we have as the Church to share the Gospel with all races, ethnicities, and genders

What the hearer should do as a result:

While our call to minister together as the Church, and as individuals is not the same as the Twelve, we are to share His love and grace those in need that Christ shows to us. We minister with what He gives us to work with and through the heart change that we receive from the very message we are to share. We do so by being aware of the intentions of the world around us while remaining innocent faithful people who are living sacrifices to our God.

Subject Sentence: Gospel Ministers being shrewd and innocent

Introduction: When we think a lesson doesn't apply to us:

One of the biggest ways I've gotten myself into trouble is tuning out instructions that I thought I didn't need to hear. How many arguments have you had with your spouse because you tuned out in the middle of what your spouse was telling you, thinking, "I've already heard this before." Or "This

isn't important to me." But then lo and behold you're caught when your spouse says, "I just told you this a minute ago!"

I was reminded of a time during my years in Middle School when I was caught not listening. It was at that awkward age when you are trying very hard to be cool and fit in. The teacher was reviewing what we were supposed to do during a fire drill. I said to myself. "I've already heard this before. Besides, we already had our fire drill for the month." But about 10 minutes later the fire alarm sounded. I was the first one out the door and down the hall, following protocol I knew to be normal, and headed out the front door. Only no one followed me. I was out there by myself. And the door shut behind me. Everyone else had been listening to the teacher who told us we were now supposed to head out back onto the playground. I was by myself. I knew I was in trouble. I could hear my class in back. I ran around the side of the building, but the gate leading to the playground was locked. I scaled the fence, catching my pantleg on the barbs on the top and ripping a hole in the seat of my pants. By the time I got to where my class was, they had headed back in, and the door was locked. I had to bang on the window of my classroom to get someone's attention to let me back in. My teacher just shook her head at me and sighed. After a long moment she came and opened the door and let me in. She sent me down the hall to the principal's office. There I had to explain first, to the principal, and then to my mom, why I needed a new pair of pants.

Some people make a similar mistake with our Gospel Lesson today. They pass off Jesus' instructions as being applicable to only those certain Twelve Disciples that Jesus sent to be His Apostles 2,000 years ago in Palestine. And a good portion of His instructions do pertain to them and them alone. But there are also things that apply to the Church today. Things that apply to the Church living in the midst of a world turned on its head by protests and riots. Jesus has important things to say to you and to me today, right here, right now.

Christ calls us to share His Vision

Matthew 9:35-36 ³⁵ **And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.** ³⁶ **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**

Our Gospel Lesson opens with Jesus traveling from city to city and from country village to country village. All the while His eyes open. And He saw. He saw people who were troubled and harassed in the life they were forced to live. A people whose ancestors once ruled the land where they lived, but now were forced to live under Roman occupation and rule. They felt the injustice put upon them as an occupied people. A Roman centurion could stop you as you were going about your business and make you carry his load for a mile. He could force you to clear the road for his horses, fix the governor's chariot if it broke down. The Romans considered the Jews as a conquered race, a lesser people who didn't have the same rights to a fair trial or hearing that Roman citizens had. And if you were to become so fed up that you and your friends decided to revolt, the Roman army had a quick response. They would swoop down with swords drawn and begin to kill all those in their way: men, women, and children. It didn't matter if you weren't part of the riot, if you were just an innocent

observer. They killed until the crowd dispersed and the riot stopped. And those ringleaders they wanted to make an example of, they hung them on crosses on the road leading out from the city for all to see. Jesus saw this. But He saw more. He saw people who were suffering from incurable diseases. He saw people feeling beaten up and downtrodden by the oppression that comes with being an occupied by a foreign power. But He saw an even deeper problem behind all this. He saw people suffering from the spiritual oppression that comes when your god is yourself or any other thing besides the LORD God.

The Jews dreamed of a better time when they ruled themselves once again. They were looking for the Messiah to come to throw off Roman rule and make them a free people once again. They dreamed of a restored Jewish Kingdom that would be heaven on earth. People still have the same dream today. They believe that if only those who looked like them and thought like them were in power all the problems, we are now facing would go away. In America of the past our country was governed by White Anglo-Saxon males. Things were generally favorable for those who share these ethnic traits, but not necessarily for those who did not. And while things have improved for minorities, life, equality, and justice are still far from what it should be for them. The death of George Floyd was just a spark that ignited the anger and frustration of the black community protesting real problems of inequality and racism toward them.

Jesus' eyes are open to racism and injustice, both then and now. How should we, the Church, respond? How did Jesus respond in His day to a situation that was even worse? He didn't start a protest against Rome. He didn't call for His followers to take up arms or to break windows, or to riot and loot. He didn't call for them to set up their own country withing a country. He refused their call for Him to be their Military Messiah many wanted Him to be. He did move His Apostle Paul in Romans 13 to describe government as being God's gift to keep the temporal peace. He charged His followers to live in submission to that authority as long as it doesn't supersede God's commands to us.

But Jesus doesn't just ignore the plight of these downtrodden, broken, and hurting people. He sees the cause of their brokenness. They are spiritually lost. They are like sheep without a shepherd. He feels their pain deep within Himself. And He responds by having compassion for those who are hurting both physically and spiritually. And He responds with compassion and love that is unique to Him. It wells up from within Him and will flow out toward these poor helpless souls.

Christ calls us to share His Compassion

Matthew 9:37-38 ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus calls those following Him to share in His concern for the lost around Him. He calls us the Church to do the same today. And what is the first thing that He tells us to do? It's the last thing that those who are hurting and calling for racial and social justice are doing today. He calls them to pray. To earnestly turn to God, the only one that can help with such a huge problem. To petition God to

send help for these people because they are lost. Because as bad as things are now, they will get much worse.

There is a harvest day coming. A last day, when all people will be gathered together. Those who remain lost, who refuse to believe in Jesus as their Good Shepherd will be eternally lost. They will receive true justice for what all their acts of disobedience have earned for them. They will suffer physical, emotional, and spiritual pain They will deal with anger directed at themselves that will know no end; anger for throwing away the key to eternal bliss that was offered to them in the Gospel. Instead they will experience suffering that is beyond our imagination and will never end. Jesus doesn't wish to see that happen to anyone.

God loves each and every person who has ever lived or will ever live too much to allow them to go to everlasting torment without a fight. His love sees no boundaries of race, color, ethnic origin, social status, or gender. His love and compassion drove the Son of God to come to earth. To become one of us. To live among a people that are dissatisfied with what God has given to them as their allotment. People who are selfish and do not want to share what God has given them with anyone else, especially those who look, and act, and talk different than we do. He came to live among us. And even when we act our worst, He still loves us.

This is a love that we don't have within ourselves. It's the love that Paul describes in **Romans 5:6-8**
⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person---though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die---⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Although you did not love Him, He loved you with a love so strong that He gave His life to save you. When no one else was willing, nor had the power to help you, He came to be the perfect sacrifice for your sin and my sin. And then sent His Spirit, preached to you in the Gospel Message, to make His life, death, and resurrection for you. And in that gift of the Gospel Message comes His love, planted in your heart and mine. A love that is nurtured, watered, and grows through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

Christ calls us and sends us to gather unto Him

Matthew 10:1 And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

Jesus saw. Jesus had compassion. And that compassion moved Him to act. He called from among the large group of disciples that had been following Him a certain Twelve. These He gave the power and authority to be an extension of the ministry that He had been doing. He made them apostles. They were empowered to join Him in the work of healing every disease and affliction, casting out evil spirits, and preaching the Gospel message that restores lost sheep back into His Kingdom.

The Church today does not have this call. It was a special call for these Twelve only, for this time and this place. We have not been given the powers to heal, to cast out demons, to raise the dead as they were. But through the Great Commission and Pentecost we, the Church, have been empowered to share the Gospel Message that changes hearts and minds. The message that restores people from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Jesus.

Christ Sends us to be wise and innocent

Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

Jesus warned the Twelve that they would face persecution. And all of them did when they were sent out into the world after Pentecost. We, the Church, have not been sent out in the same way. The Great Commission tells us that wherever we may be going as part of our daily lives, that is where we are to share the Gospel Message. Just as with the Twelve, there will be many who don't listen to us. Those who don't want Jesus to have any part of their lives. Those that berate us for our faith. We are not to judge them. We are to pray for them. We are to pray that the Holy Spirit will work in them before they reach Judgement Day

We too go out as sheep among wolves. We realize that some people will only want to take advantage of our willingness to help. There will always be those who, as with the Twelve, do not accept us or the Savior that we try to share with them. Some may get angry with us. There are those who feel that violent protest is the only answer for their problems. We look at them with the same compassion that Jesus had for those in His day. They too are lost sheep. They are hurt people who are pawns for the real enemy: Satan. The devil pulls the strings of their sinful selfish hearts to react inappropriately with violence. How should the Church respond? Paul tells us in **Ephesians 6:10-13** **¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.** We don't join in with the schemes of the devil. We don't align ourselves with groups and events where the outcome is violence and rioting. We support good government and good police officers. And we reach out in love with the only thing that can change hearts and lives of those on both sides of the issue. Jesus love and compassion in the Gospel.

Conclusion

Jesus did call a certain Twelve Disciples to be His Apostles. He authorized them and empowered to join Him in His ministry. While He has not empowered us in the same way, He does send His Church out into a world being torn apart by the sin that lives in people's hearts, while the devil pushes their buttons. Jesus didn't join in the revolt, and neither should we. We go out with the one thing that can change hearts and minds: The Gospel Message. We go empowered by the Holy Spirit who restores spiritual dead people to life. Our aim is not to create heaven on earth, but to grant faith that saves people for eternal life in the new heaven and earth to come. It is the place where injustice, and hate, and racism, and rioting, and death, will be no more. Where the love of Christ will rule forever. Dear Christ, empower us here to join in your mission to save souls. In Your name we pray. Amen