**Matthew 9:35-10:20 June 14, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew chapters 9-10 here re-reading these words. “but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How many times have you watched a tutorial video, or heard someone explain how they made something or did something over the years and have mistakenly thought to yourself “If they can do it, so can I!” And so, without the proper training, instruction or even supervision, you go off and attempt to do the same thing that they did, with disastrous results. I’ve seen them drive it, build it, use it, I’m sure I can do the same thing. Usually these sort of attempts end badly, the easy steps of a complex food dish are followed with no attention to the details, and it comes out wrong. Or the building materials have been mangled from the take home kit after you tried to build it on your own. Just because they could do it, doesn’t mean that you can, which is what makes experts so important. Experts hold authority. You need someone who knows what’s going on.

The twelve disciples were blessed to see Jesus perform many amazing signs and miracles after they started following him. You can imagine what it was like to watch it all from the sideline, but here in our Gospel lesson, we see their moment to shine. Jesus sends them out and gives them impossible instructions. Preach, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons. Goodness gracious, I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t know where to start. It is one thing to preach the message, to repeat the truth of Jesus as the Christ and to point to a true and lasting eternal kingdom rather than the perishing kingdom of the world. The message of the kingdom was a confusion of the people that lasted all the way to when Jesus enters Jerusalem, and even after His resurrection as the disciples ask if now is the moment that he will restore an earthly kingdom of power. Preach the good news of the kingdom? Maybe, seems to be something that could be done. Heal the sick? Raise the dead? Cleanse lepers and cast out demons? How? Seeing Jesus do it was one thing, accomplishing it themselves was an impossible task. And yet off they went, out amongst the lost sheep of Israel, told to do something by the very Son of God.

They must have been the very best to accomplish these things, right? A dream team of the most faithful and powerful amongst the people. Not at all. Fishermen, tax collectors, commoners, not one of them as theologically trained as a Pharisee or Sadducee, and even amongst them Matthew records, a betrayer. These men weren’t powerful in their own right. Instead we see later on in the Gospels how they became cowards who hid behind doors and abandoned Jesus when He needed them the most. These weren’t superheroes, they were regular men. Laborers sent out to harvest, nothing special, but ones who had seen firsthand the power of God. God the Father who had sent the world His very own Son. In earlier chapters of Matthew it records how this Son; Jesus Christ had accomplished the things that He was sending the disciples out to do. Sending the disciples the power to accomplish those things wouldn’t rest in their own power or might, their faith or how “spiritual” they were. The power would rest solely in Jesus, and the authority that Jesus gives them was over the sick, the dying, those with diseases like leprosy and especially over Satan and the demons. For the disciples to do it on their own was impossible, but through Jesus working in them, miraculous things would be done.

None more miraculous than the continuation of the core message of the Gospel. Jesus travels throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel or Good News of the kingdom, that was the first and foremost message that He brought. The healing of earthly ailments and evidence of sin was secondary, the condition of their souls was the most important thing, and the truth of the Gospel, that this man who was standing before them came to save them from their sin. He who was without sin, came to those with sin, and even led sinful men, to go out into the harvest and call others to himself.

The description of the people here in Matthew 9 isn’t promising, in many ways it is a description of how people are today, “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” In short, they were ill-equipped to face the world around them. Sheep need a leader, someone to guide them where they will eat, where they will drink and where they will rest. At the time of Jesus there were religious leaders, shepherds of the people who strongly enforced the Laws of God. It wasn’t that the people had no shepherds of any kind, it’s just that the shepherds didn’t lead, they instead harassed the people. The rules that were in place were focused on the personal piety of each individual person, and therefore the religious leaders saw themselves as the holier and greater ones because they believed they were keeping those laws while the people didn’t. The people weren’t being taught or led, they were wandering helplessly through a world of sin and being harassed not just by the agents of Satan himself, but also by those who were put in place to teach them and protect them.

A group of people wandering helplessly with no direction, while being harassed. Again, it doesn’t sound so strange or foreign to our world today. Can you think of anyone who fits that description? Can you think of anyone who suffers from disease and sickness? Anyone who struggles with sadness and depression? Anyone who has been beaten down by the weight of a world of sin? Are they in your family? Is it you? Do you feel that there is no direction, no peace, no guidance? That you have to protect yourself, you have to heal yourself, you have to find a means of saving yourself and caring for yourself, because no one else is going to come and help you? Those feelings are the result of sin. Sin is separation. Sin is isolation. Sin and guilt are the tools of the devil to isolate you from the true source of love in the world; the love of God Your Heavenly Father, and make you believe that you are all alone. Like a sheep lost in the wilderness. Like a soldier who is surrounded by enemies. Like a person who sets out to do a complex task, after witnessing an expert do it, and soon after step 1 they are lost, confused, and frustrated.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” He still has compassion today. Jesus still loves the lost and forsaken, the isolated and sick, those oppressed by demons and those wore down by the requirements of the Law. “Come to me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you, rest.” Jesus in His ministry went out to those who were in need and healed them, and preached to them the true Gospel of a lasting kingdom, restored them to a place of peace, and reflected the love that God the Father has for them in acts of mercy and signs of his power. Jesus showed a perfect love to the entire world by sacrificing himself on the cross, by dying in the place of the ungodly, by being the perfect sacrificial lamb of all people of all time.

Which is the astounding standard that was set for the disciples as they set out, tasked to serve by Jesus. Which is the same standard that we all bear as Christians in our own lives. The men who were called to share the Good News of the Gospel to the sick and perishing of that time could never accomplish those miraculous things on their own, but instead they were blessed with the authority of Jesus Christ, to do these miraculous things. And so when they entered the house of someone who was left in the dark of sin, and who didn’t know the true message of the Gospel, it wasn’t the disciples who spread the good news, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, but it was Jesus working through them that proclaimed to the people. When the disciples came upon those who were sick and in need of cleansing, it was Christ working through them that brought healing. It was Jesus who raised the dead back to life and cast out demons and unclean spirits even though the disciples were the instruments that He used to accomplish these amazing things. It was Jesus who worked through the hands of lowly men, to bring about the bountiful harvest of salvation for those isolated, harassed, and helpless against the power of the devil.

The harvest is still plentiful now today more than ever. The disciples saw Jesus do these amazing signs and no doubt thought, “He can do it, but I can’t.” And yet they still accomplished amazing things through Jesus working through them. In the same way we may look at the Scriptures, look at the work of missionaries, Church Leaders, evangelists, Professors, and Pastors and other professional Church Workers and think to ourselves, “They can go out and do it, but I can’t.” Yet the harvest needs to be brought in. Souls of men and women are perishing, and the call goes out. As we will sing in our closing hymn: “Hark the voice of Jesus crying, Who will go and work today? Fields are white and harvest waiting Who will bear the sheaves away?”

Is it you? Is God calling you to be a Church Worker? Have you ever really thought about serving in that way? Is it someone you know? A child, a friend, a co-worker? Do we ever pray for God to send workers into the harvest? Or for one moment, can we stop and look at this text and see that God, who used the imperfect instruments of these 12 men. Who worked even through someone like Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus into the hands of lawless men, to accomplish amazing signs and call people to faith. That we, in the same way, where we have been planted, where God has called us, in the vocations that He has placed us to serve and provide for our families and for our communities, that we are put there for a specific reason, to serve the Lord, to call others to faith, to share the good news of the Gospel and a lasting kingdom of heaven. So in that sense, instead of seeing this as the responsibility of everyone to go and become Pastors and teachers and missionaries in foreign lands, that we thank the Lord and serve with Gladness in the places that we have been called, and, finally with joy, answer the call of the Master; Jesus Christ, by Gladly saying “Here am I, send me, send me.”

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.