

Sunday 18th June 2017: SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. YR. A

Gospel: Matthew 9:35-10:8

"Jesus sent out these twelve after instructing them thus, ". . . As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."

An Amish boy and his father were visiting a mall. They were amazed by almost everything they saw, but especially by two shiny, silver walls that could move apart and back together again. The boy asked his father, "What is this, Father?" The father responded, "Son, I have never seen anything like this in my life, I don't know what it is."

While the boy and his father were watching wide-eyed an old lady in a wheel chair rolled up to the moving walls and pressed a button. The walls opened and the lady rolled between them into a small room. The walls closed and the boy and his father watched small circles of lights w/numbers above the walls light up. They continued to watch the circles light up in the reverse direction. The walls opened again and a beautiful 24-year-old woman stepped out.

The father said to his son, "Go get your Mother."

In the Name of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

We have just heard a depiction of the kind of person Jesus is, one who loves people and enjoys being with and helping them. Mathew wrote about his master, "Jesus went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness".

Jesus was not the kind of person to stay in one place and have the people come to him. He was out there on the road, travelling from little town to village, always on the move. Our Lord had such a love for God's people that he did not expect them to travel to Jerusalem. He came to them.

Today's Gospel serves as a narrative transition from Matthew's recounting of Jesus' miracles and works of wonder (chapters 8 and 9) to Jesus' missionary discourse (chapters 10 and 11).

The missionary dimension of discipleship is centred in two images: the "sheep without a shepherd" and harvest in need of laborers. Having established his identity as God's Christ in his work as a healer, Jesus now commissions the Twelve and his Church to heal hearts and souls in a ministry of reconciliation:

"cure the sick" – bring back to God those who are alienated, those who are lost, those who are weak (the Greek word used in the text of today's Gospel *asthenes* means "weak");

"raise the dead" – lift up those hopelessly and helplessly dead because of sin, who are blind and deaf to the grace of God, who are entombed by poverty, racism and violence;

"cleanse lepers" – bring back the sons and daughters of God who are rejected or estranged from the human family;

"drive out demons" – liberate those enslaved by sin and evil.

Jesus compassion for the "shepherdless" calls us to bring to the lost, forgotten and marginalized (those Pope Francis calls those on the "periphery"). Today's Gospel reaffirms our responsibility as disciples of Jesus to welcome rather than condemn, to lift up rather than judge those who have not heard the voice of the shepherd, to seek reconciliation with those from whom we are estranged or separated for whatever reason.

Every one of us, in our struggle to make sense out of life, seeks absolutes by which to guide our decisions, formulae to determine what is fair and good, yardsticks to judge success and failure. Masters and gurus, saviours and deliverers, parties and movements of every stripe preach to their followers how to secure fortunes but not how to live, how to feel better but not how to cure what afflicts, how to conquer one's enemies but not how to live lives of justice and peace. Christ the "shepherd" walks with us on our life's journey through hurt and change and maturity and wholeness to the dwelling place of God.

The defining mark of discipleship is the willingness and commitment to bring healing to the broken, comfort to the afflicted, hope to the despairing. In his first "organizational meeting" of the Twelve, Jesus commissions them to take on the work of healing, restoring, reconciling. Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them power to preach, to heal and defeat the enemy. He sent Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, the brothers James and John, Matthew and

Thomas and all the others. They went out, and for the rest of their lives they travelled and preached and taught until the day they died. That was how Jesus loved his people. He told them first to go to the people of Israel and proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand. They didn't have to take money, for the people they preached to would supply all their needs. If they wouldn't hear or believe, they were to move on. There would be no charge to hear the good news. It was a free gift to the world.

My friends, things haven't changed. The Gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus has come here today, but there's a world of people out there who either haven't heard or haven't considered that it could be true. Christ has done everything to make it possible for their salvation to be delivered to them. All it takes is for a disciple to go.

As God humbled himself to become one of us and be part of our lives, we are called to the same humility in order to bring the compassion and forgiveness of God to the poor, the needy, the helplessly and hopelessly "dead," the alienated, the rejected and the abused.

Amen.

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