

GOSPEL LESSON: MATTHEW 9:35 – 10:8

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching 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} He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil 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, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (NIV84)

Prayer of the Day

O God, protector of all the faithful, you alone make strong; you alone make holy. Show us your mercy and forgive our sins day by day. Guide us through our earthly lives that we do not lose the things you have prepared for us in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day

Alleluia. May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy. Alleluia. (Psalm 132:9)

Sermon Text:

Over the past several months we have seen some truly horrific sights in the news. Overrun hospitals and shell-shocked doctors and nurses combating a virus that has claimed hundreds of thousands worldwide. Now, it is civil unrest which spilled into the streets of society as the debate over systemic racism in our country (something worth our consideration) often degrades into the violence which began the conversation. I must admit, I have often found myself struggling to wrap my brain around everything that is happening, even wondering on more than one occasion how best to move forward in the fog of fear all the unknowns can create.

Today, Jesus once again enters in. As I read and reread the Gospel lesson this week it was hard not to think a least a little about everything that was happening these days. Jesus surveys a sea of humanity that struggles with illness and disease which run rampant and unchecked in their day and who are actually a subjugated nation held captive under the power and might of the Roman Empire. But again, in true form, Jesus gets to the heart not only of the problem but of the solution too when He urges us all, **FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE.**

Our lesson begins, ³⁵ *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching 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.*

Does anything grab your attention in those words? Surely Jesus takes note of the social problems and even solves them which is amazing in and of itself as He flexes just a little bit of the divine muscle

that is veiled in His human flesh. There is probably another sermon in the fact that Jesus teaches and preaches, uses the Word instead of simply zapping faith into the hearts and minds of those gathered around. But there is another item of interest in the second verse. Jesus has compassion on these people not because they are sick and dying or because they are subjugated by the Roman Empire. Instead, He sees the heart of the issue. He has compassion *because they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*. The real issue is the shepherding that is lacking. Pharisees and Sadducees, teachers of the law that focused on work righteousness, what we can do/should do, rather than the preaching of the good news of the kingdom. This of course always leads to one of two ends. Either I turn inward and despair, because I can never do enough or I look outward and become enraged because in my self-righteousness, I believe others aren't doing half as much as I do.

And so the pangs of guilt set in don't they? How am I supposed to help the world out there, or for that matter even make sense of it when I'm as messed up as any of them, as much in need as any other human being I come into contact with?

Yet this is exactly the person Jesus calls to do His work. Peter often looks like a mess, doesn't he? So often relying on himself and getting burned in the process. James and John, the sons of thunder who would rather seem the wicked vanish in bolts of lightening from heaven than saved by the compassion of the Gospel. Thomas who doubts, Matthew the Roman sympathizer and Simon the zealot who was more prone to riot in the streets against them. And Judas who will ultimately not only betray Jesus but throw away not only silver but salvation as he despairs over his own action.

But then isn't this the point? That they, that we might see the real problem alive and well in this world of ours, alive and well within ourselves and then and only then remember what the only solution to it all really is. What did the second lesson so beautifully point out? "*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6).*" God once more reminds me of the help He has not only offered to me but can offer through me as well. In Jesus righteousness, He has shattered my self-righteousness and overcome my despair as He gives me the very perfection He requires. In Jesus blood spilled on the cross comes the only solution which will ever take on the sin that rages in my heart and in my mind, crucifying it with Christ. In Jesus' resurrection the only thing that really cures sickness or death triumphing over it even as it promises resurrections of our own and because none of this is earned or deserved by those who have received it, Jesus reminds us, just as *freely as you have received, you can freely give*.

And so dear friends, God commissions you. And note again what He gives for the task, preach the message, oh for sure the apostles also were able to perform miracles or better stated God performed miracles through them. but let us not be so quick to discredit what God does today, in the water and Word as He grants faith in the hearts of His people even as He washes away their sins. In bread and wine, which is at the same time Christ's very body and blood which give the forgiveness He earned for us. In that Word, which is the gracious good news which saves us and which can save, does save others.

Knowing what God has done for us, continues to do for us every moment of each day, why would we ever withhold this message from someone else? Of course, such a thought would be monstrous. No, instead, having been saved by grace and through faith, freely given by a merciful God we will hold His message out to any to all who have the need, brothers and sisters that's every living human being.

Over the last several months, it has felt at times as if the world was unraveling under my feet. I have often found myself struggling to wrap my brain around everything that is happening, even wondering on more than one occasion how best to move forward in the fog of the fear all the unknowns can create. But then our lesson today once more reminded me that the world has always been unraveling, at least ever since sin entered it. And no matter how it might rear its ugly head, there is always and only one solution to it. It's Jesus once again and since He has done everything for me freely and in love, well, perhaps I should hold Him out in this world until He returns. Yes, dear friends, as people saved in the blood of Jesus, **FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE.** Amen.