

Text: Matthew 9:35-10:8

MAT 9:35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

When the God and Father of our salvation sent His beloved Son into our world, it was to do the work given Him by the Father to do. Our Gospel for this morning gives us the verbs that shape Jesus' work: teaching, preaching, and healing. These are the "Jesus verbs" - what Jesus did in all the towns and villages of Galilee and Judea, and wherever He went. They are the verbs Jesus continues to do today in and through His Church, which is His body, for you and for the whole world for which He died.

Jesus taught in the synagogues. The synagogue was the house of the Holy Scriptures, where Torah was taught. There Jesus opened the Scriptures and He taught the people concerning Himself. Jesus catechized them. He taught the people "what does this mean?" and "where is this written?" He taught them the doctrine, the teaching that His coming in the flesh was the fulfillment of everything that Moses and the prophets had written. The people were amazed at His teaching, for it came with its own authority. Jesus came to teach because we do not know and could not know the truth of God on our own. Jesus came to teach the truth to fallen man. The truth is that all men are liars and there is not a grain of the truth to found in us by nature. The truth is that Jesus is the Truth that wipes out the Lie and destroys the death which the Lie brings.

Jesus came teaching. His followers called Him "rabbi," teacher; He called them "disciples," learners. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be one who is taught by Him. "If you continue in my Word, Jesus says, you will be my disciples and you will know the Truth and the truth will make you free." Jesus' teaching frees people from themselves to be the free people of God.

Jesus didn't subscribe to the philosophy of the modern educationists who say that everything there is to be known is already deep down inside of us; it just has to be coaxed and tweezed out of us by the right experiences. Something akin to coaxing a burp from a baby. But all that comes naturally from us is the Lie and sin. We have no natural knowledge of God's mercy and love. Oh, we can know that God exists and that He is great and powerful and eternal, but even that knowledge is bent and distorted. We are all conceived in darkness, blindness, and ignorance. We are born imagining that we are gods and that God is the image and likeness we see in the mirror. We must be taught the truth of God by God. And so Jesus came teaching.

Jesus preached. He preached the gospel of the kingdom. He announced the "good news" like a herald calling out in the streets: "The kingdom of God has come near." The king was coming, His reign had begun. That's what preaching is. Proclaiming, calling out in the streets and from the rooftops: Here He comes. "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in." There is good news! The King has come, and He has come to claim you for His kingdom!

And what a surprise when the King arrived. Jesus didn't look like king, much less God. A Jewish carpenter from Nazareth. Crowned with thorns. Enthroned on a cross. Mocked by His subjects. Crucified and bleeding. Despised and rejected. "Come down from the cross and save yourself. Behave like a king and we will believe you." Behold your King. A beggar King in a kingdom of beggars, who laid down His life for his beggar subjects. The good news of the kingdom is that sinners the likes of us are the welcomed subjects, and that King Jesus rules over His kingdom with His death and resurrection.

Jesus healed. He healed every disease and malady of the people. He came as the good Physician of the body and the soul, healing every kind of disease, casting out demons, giving sight to the blind, speech to the mute, hearing to the deaf. Wherever Jesus was, disease and the demons fled. Where Jesus was there came a new creation, Paradise, Adam and Eve as they were before they wanted to be like God. Where Jesus was with His Word, the darkness and disease and death gave way to Light and Life. Jesus is the Light and the Life. He is greater than the devils, greater than the darkness, greater than any sickness, sin, or even death.

His teaching, preaching, and healing were a preparation, a foretaste of the feast to come. They were not an end in themselves. They were road signs pointing ahead down the road to the cross, the grave, the open tomb, to His own death and resurrection. Jesus knew where He was going, and He was bidding the crowds to follow Him through His death to the resurrection to eternal life. He was teaching, preaching, and healing them to death, drawing them into His death, so that they would rise to live forever under Him in His kingdom.

Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing flowed from His compassion. He had compassion on the crowds. Compassion is a word that has to do with the guts. In the Bible's way of speaking, the guts are where the feelings are. We speak that way sometimes. "It made me sick to my stomach." Jesus looked on that crowds that followed him and clamored for His attention that swarming, sweaty, sinning mob filled with disease and demons and death. He saw in their faces the deep lines of anxiety over work, family, health. He saw in their eyes the search for something certain and concrete. He saw shepherdless sheep, isolated individuals running in every direction, each one going their own way, uncentered, unfocused, climbing on the backs of one another, kicking, butting, and biting one another. He saw us in our lives unbuckled from God.

The sight wrenched His guts. But He didn't point and wag His finger and tell the crowd to shape up and get their lives in order. He knew they couldn't. Jesus had compassion on them. He didn't see a hopeless heap of misguided

humanity. He saw a harvest field ripe for the picking. Reflect on the compassion of Jesus the next time you are in a crowd, say at a ball game, or the theater, or standing in line for a movie or a concert. Say to yourself, "These are people for whom Jesus died." You are looking at part of the Lord's harvest field. Let it wrench your guts to see crowds of people who are lost and dying, in need of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing and don't realize it. Jesus looks on you with the same compassionate gaze from the right hand of God. Out of that compassion He gives to you everything He has and everything He is for you - His Word, His Body and Blood, His death and resurrection. He gives it freely. Never in the history of the world was there such compassion as Jesus' gut-wrenching compassion for the shepherdless crowds. It drove Him to the cross.

Out of that compassion, Jesus bids His disciples to pray. "Pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send workers into his field." Such a simple thing - prayer. Too simple, perhaps, for us who are so bedazzled by the madness of methods. We fret and fuss over the state of the family, our society, the church and our congregation. We're in a mess. We search here and there for this or that gimmick that will be the key to turning things around. Instead of wringing our hands, we ought to be folding them. "Pray." Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send workers into the fields. Pray that the Lord would raise up from our midst men to be pastors, faithful shepherds who will feed and tend the lambs and sheep of God's flock. Pray that the Lord would send parents to teach their children. Pray for our schools and seminaries and catechism classes.

Pray that the Lord would send workers into his harvest field. Please notice that it is *workers* the Lord sends, field hands, day laborers. It is unglamorous, sweaty, grubby, work that He sends His workers into. The kind that gets dirt under your fingernails. It goes on in the day to day grind of life, around the dinner table, in casual conversation with your neighbor and co-worker, beside the sick bed, on the road. It goes on in the Christian congregation, where Christ's Word is preached and taught, where Christ's Body and Blood are eaten and drunk, where God's people are baptized and taught. Field work appears ordinary and everyday, even boring at times. Too ordinary for those who look for the splashy and spectacular and the "spiritual." But this is Jesus' compassion at work in the nooks and crannies of life, hidden under the ordinary. That's where His harvest field is.

So great and deep is Jesus compassion for you, that He sends you preachers to preach with His authority and commission. Jesus called His Twelve to Himself, and He authorized them to preach and to heal, to do the same works that He Himself was doing. He sent them into His harvest as His ministers, his authorized agents who spoke and acted in His name.

They were a strange lot. Four were fishermen by trade - Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John. Matthew was a tax collector, considered a traitor to his people. Simon the Cananaean was a zealot, a member of a radical separatist political group, who probably had little use for tax collectors like Matthew. Of five we know nothing: Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, and Thaddaeus. Ironically, the best known among them was Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus. They were all rough, unmanicured men. They could be headstrong and hot-tempered, as James and John demonstrated. Jesus nicknamed them "sons of thunder." They could be as uneven and unreliable as Simon Peter was, the great confessor and denier of Jesus. They doubted like Thomas. They bickered with one another over who was the greatest. They abandoned Jesus in his time of trial. They are no different than us.

Which of these twelve would you want on a short list for pastoral candidates? Which pair would you want knocking at your door and taking up temporary residence in your home? Or does it matter? It all depends on whether you are looking or listening. Each of them spoke the word of Christ by His authority. That's what matters. Jesus was the One working in and through them, teaching us to trust in His Word and not in the persons or the personalities of the people who deliver it. Jesus wants to be heard, not seen.

Jesus sent his these twelve with a commission. They were under orders. They didn't go off willy nilly wherever they felt like it. They went where they were sent. Not to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. After His death and resurrection, Jesus would send them to all the nations, baptizing and teaching. This was a preliminary sending, a kind of vicarage or internship. The Lord is the Lord of the harvest. We aren't. He knows best where to locate His disciples. He puts us in our places in your home, at work, in your neighborhood, and sets you next to others and says, "Here is the portion of my harvest field where you will work."

The Twelve did what they were given to do. They preached the good news of the kingdom, healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons. They did the "Jesus verbs," and it was Jesus who worked through them. That is how Jesus deals with us. He will not deal directly with us. He is too compassionate and gracious to do that. He knows that the face-to-face presence of His glory would devastate and destroy us. Instead He hides Himself behind those He sends in His name. He sends pastors to shepherd His Church, and He sends His Church into the world as His royal priesthood. We are all on the receiving end His sending. Out of His compassion for you, he sends you preachers and surrounds you with His Word. Many of you were brought you to Baptism as helpless infants and to the church by your parents. Some of you had friends or classmates or co-workers who spoke the Word of Christ to you. Sooner or later, every Christian encounters a pastor in order to be baptized, absolved, and fed the Body and Blood of Jesus.

You have been died for in the death of Jesus. You have been baptized into Jesus' death, joined to Him in His cross and resurrection, and filled with the Holy Spirit. You have heard the preaching of His kingdom, the good news that in the crucified and risen flesh of Jesus the kingdom of God has come to you. You have received the healing of your death

that underlies all disease. You have received the same body and blood that went into death on the cross and rose victorious from the grave on the third day. You are blessed in the Triune Name. "Freely you have received; freely give."

You are sent in God's name to this dying world to proclaim the saving death of Jesus with your lips and your lives until He comes, to teach your children and your neighbor the truth of their sin and their Savior, to bring them to the healing water of Baptism and His Word and the Supper of Jesus' body and blood which deliver the sinner from the disease of death. The same compassionate Lord Jesus who has worked for you and in you, will work through you to proclaim the good news of his kingdom, to teach the truth of His salvation, to bring His healing to the nations. He is faithful and He is compassionate.