

Sermon 14 June 2020

In our Gospel passage that we have just read we see that Jesus sends out his twelve disciples to teach, heal, and preach/proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God throughout the villages of Israel. He gives them authority/power to be able to carry out this ministry. He provides instructions on how to go about it as well warning them that it will not be easy. The last verses of chapter 9 (v35-38) set the scene and context for the rest of what follows in our reading today. These first words tell us about Jesus' ministry – "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness" (v 35). This is the ministry to which he calls and prepares/trains the disciples for before sending them out. This is the ministry to which we – as believers and the church - are called. To Heal, Proclaim and Teach.

Listen again to these words:

'Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."'

Jesus sees this crowd of people who are - as another version puts it – "confused and aimless". There is really no one to lead them – to heal, proclaim and teach them. The religious leaders at the time had little to offer the people and in fact they placed additional burdens on them by requiring exact observance of the law. And so the crowd flocks to Jesus because he offers them healing and direction - he feeds them - teaching and preaching - the good news of the kingdom.

Yes, there are many people who are hurting. Many who need to hear the good news of the kingdom – that God loves all people so much "that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) in order to reconcile us to God. Isn't it sad that there are so few people – "the labourers are few" – to share this wonderful message. Especially now, when so many are struggling - unemployed, hungry, sick - and really need Jesus to walk in our neighbourhoods healing our hurts, our diseases and telling us that the kingdom of God is here. And yet, we need to remember that Jesus started with just this small group of (twelve) disciples and look at their impact on the world – throughout the ages right down to us here and now today.

I came across a story that I would like to share with you. It is a story about a group called 'The Fisherman's Fellowship'. As you can hear by their name, this group were interested in fishing. They were close to lakes and streams that were full of fish and they would meet regularly to talk about fishing. They would get so excited and worked up just talking about how good it would feel to catch fish.

They studied all there was to study about fish and fishing. They attended conferences, participated in research projects and some even got PhD's in fishology and shared their knowledge with other fisherman. Everyone thought this was a good idea. But still no one had yet gone fishing.

So they tried something different. They formed a committee to send fisherman out and discovered that there were more fishing places than fisherman. So they created a priority list which was put up on the bulletin boards in all the fellowship halls. But still no one went

fishing. So they ran a survey to find out what the problem was. This was not very successful as only a few responded. And what they found out from the responses they did receive was that some felt called to study fish, others felt called to see to the fishing equipment, and others felt called to go around encouraging the fisherman.

As a result, no one went fishing.

Then a newcomer, Jake, joined the fellowship. And after his first meeting Jake was so inspired that he went fishing. He tried a few things, got the hang of it, and caught a fish. At the next meeting he shared his experience. He was regarded in high esteem and requested to speak at various meetings to tell others how he did it. Soon he got so caught up in meetings and speaking events that – you guessed it – he no longer had time to go fishing.

But soon he began to feel restless and empty. He so wanted to just go fishing again. So he stopped attending meetings and speaking events and he said to a friend, “Let’s go fishing.” They did, just the two of them, and they caught fish.

The members of the Fisherman’s Fellowship were many, the fish were plentiful, but the fishers were few. (The Fisherman’s Fellowship – <http://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/witness/>)

Sometimes like this Fisherman’s Fellowship we feel unworthy or ill-equipped and so we spend our time studying, forming committees and discussing things in meetings because we want to get things perfect. These activities are not wrong and are needed but the problem is that we tend to spend our time and focus on them instead of just to sharing God’s love with others. Notice what Jake did – He tried a few things, got the hang of it, and caught a fish.

Notice what Jesus did. He told the disciples to pray and ask God to send workers who will have compassion. Who will offer themselves in service. Who will proclaim God’s kingdom. Then he calls the twelve, gives them authority/power to do the work, tells them what to do, warns them of the dangers and then sends them out.

But what does it mean for us today to heed God’s call for us to heal, proclaim/preach and teach. When we look a little closer at these three aspects of ministry we see:

- Jesus spent a large part of his ministry healing people. And not only physical healing but emotional as well. He spent time with the outcasts, the poor and marginalized. He made them feel welcome and accepted. He ate meals with them. In other words he didn’t just tell them he loved them. He showed them through his actions. Similarly we too can be agents of healing when we do the simple things in life – when we show compassion, mercy and love. When we stand up for, and alongside, those who are suffering injustice. When we willingly choose to serve by visiting the sick, spending time with elderly, lonely, comforting the bereaved and feeding the hungry. Basically we heal when we are present to those in need.
- Jesus preached the kingdom of God bringing hope and comfort to many. He called many to leave their old way of life behind and to follow him in a new way. He showed and shared God’s love by his example – his life, death and resurrection. This is the message we are called to proclaim/preach. We are called to share the love of God in a broken, hurting world in word and by the way we live. Or as Pope Francis puts it, “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life for you; and now he is living

at your side everyday to enlighten, strengthen and free you.” (Evangelii Gaudium, 164/ Dees, 2016: 86) These are the words that we need to tell people. They are also the words we need to live. This is the way in which we preach the kingdom of God

- Jesus taught with authority (Matthew 7: 29, Mark 1: 22) but it was not his teaching but the One who sent him – God the Father (John 7: 16). His teaching was radical and challenging. Think about the times when Jesus said, “You have heard it said... but I say to you...” At times such as these he brought a different interpretation to the laws. His message was often uncomfortable, challenging those who listened to him to seek a deeper understanding. We too are called to teach God’s ways which will not always be comfortable, popular or accepted. And in our text today we see that Jesus warns the disciples about this as well (Matthew 10: 16-23). We need to grow in our faith, in our relationship with God in order to discern and teach God’s ways. We need to know our subject matter in order to teach others but our leaning should not be so all consuming – like the Fisherman’s Fellowship - that we lose sight what we actually should be doing. Jesus equips the disciples with the authority to do the work he calls them to. Similarly, we too are equipped by the Holy Spirit to do the work God calls us to do. God uses our faith to lead others to faith in God. It is not always easy, comfortable or accepted by others. But we need to share God’s lessons and teaching with others so that they too may experience the love of God.

Just as God called and used that small group of disciples to heal, preach and teach, so he calls each one of us. When we heed this call we move from passive to active believers and we learn that faith is demanding because it leads us beyond ourselves. Let us like Jake, in the story I told, try a few small things like sharing our faith and God’s love in small tangible ways with people who cross our paths – or as another version puts it - . “Don’t begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don’t try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously” (Matthew 10: 5-8)

At the end of every Eucharist service we offer ourselves to be sent out to share with others what we have received. I pray that as we go out today God will call us, equip us and send us to share His generous love generously with others.

Amen