

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

June 14, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Zach Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church  
Pasadena, California

## Gospel: Matthew 9:35—10:8 [9-23]

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

<sup>10:1</sup> Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup> These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. [<sup>9</sup> Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup> Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. <sup>16</sup> “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. <sup>21</sup> Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup> When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”]



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After the pep talk that Jesus gave his disciples in our gospel reading today, I am amazed that they were willing to go out and carry on the mission of proclaiming the gospel in the name of Jesus. I mean, yes, Jesus tells the disciples that they will have the power to heal people, cast out demons, and even raise the dead in order to show people that the “Kingdom of God has come near.” However, Jesus also tells them that they cannot accept any payment for their service, except for food; that they are to carry no staff with them, leaving them defenseless to bandits and wild animals; and that they will most likely be met with resistance, sometimes hostile resistance. “See, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.”

And yet, the disciples did go out and they proclaimed the good news. Perhaps they felt empowered to do so because Jesus ordained them with God’s power. Perhaps they did it because they knew that the gospel message was so important that it was worth the risks involved. Or, perhaps they were encouraged by the fact that Jesus assured them that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say at the appropriate time.

The truth of the matter is that this gospel story speaks well to our own time and place. Being a disciple of Jesus in today’s society, in today’s world, is full of risks and resistance to the gospel. You see, Jesus’ message about God’s Kingdom was a threat to those who had benefited from earthly powers. It was a threat to them because Jesus’ message challenged those who would use money and either religious, social, or political status as a means to lord over others. In our society today, we still see this happening.

The gospel message of Jesus is a great equalizer because it uplifts all people as sacred and holy. It tells us that we should be in loving community with all others regardless of things like money, status, power, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and background. The gospel message tells us that the lowliest and despised by society are loved by God and cherished by God just as much as the most successful and powerful people in society. In other words, God does not value a person’s worth the way our society does.

We live in a society that values people differently. We see success in terms of money, possessions, fame, and accomplishments. The people who have more money, more status, and more power are often treated better. This is one of the reasons why prosperity gospel is so alluring to many in this country. For those who might not know, prosperity gospel is a theology that tells us that God will reward us with wealth, riches, power, and status, if we follow a certain moral code and have enough faith in God. Unfortunately, prosperity gospel is a false truth that is used to trick people into giving their money to



rich mega churches who function as if proclaiming the gospel is a business to make profit rather than a mission from God.

But this is why the gospel can be met with resistance from society. The gospel tells us that, in God's eyes, money, status, and power do not determine a person's value. What determines their value is that they are loved by God. And the truth of Christ on the cross tells us that God loves the entire world, which includes all the people in it. This means, our mission as disciples of Jesus is to show our society that even the lowliest and despised among us deserve equal treatment and opportunity because they are God's precious and beloved.

In our epistle reading from Romans this morning, Paul also talks about this understanding of being equal in Christ. He tells us that it is not what we have accomplished in life; it is not how righteous we think we are that finds us favor with God. It is the fact that, through Christ Jesus, we are already claimed as God's beloved.

What this means is that we have been freed to live differently from the world. The world would try and convince us that we need lots of money, status, and power in order to be successful in life. Christ Jesus would tell us that all that matters is his love for us and the fact that it is his love that sustains us and justifies us. We are already successful in the eyes of God simply because God loves us and cherishes us.

And what this does is frees us as a church to use the money, status, and power that we have in order to lift up those in society who are the lowliest of the low. We are free to show society that every single person, no matter who they are, is valued by God and therefore deserves equality and equity.

And yes, will this message be met with resistance, of course it will. Again, anytime the gospel message threatens to equalize earthly powers, those who have a lot of those powers will resist it. But Christ Jesus promises that, no matter how much resistance we may face, God's Word will continue to be proclaimed, and Jesus will help us find a way to proclaim it.

So, we have been freed to make a choice. We can either feel threatened by the gospel and do what we can to hold onto our money, power, and status. Or, we can be empowered by the gospel and use the money, power, and status given to us in order to bring about the Kingdom of God and help this world realize the value of all people. So, to whom will you serve?

Amen.

