



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 6A, JUNE 18, 2023
EXODUS 19:2-8a; PSALM 100; ROMANS 5:1-8; MATTHEW 9:35-10:23

PRAY, PROCLAIM

My friends, we have been through a lot so far this liturgical year. Since March our beloved, Jesus, has lived, has been crucified, has suffered, has died, and has been buried. And Jesus has been raised from the dead, resurrected! And we have been confirmed in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now what? I sometimes think of these several weeks after Pentecost as the season of “now what?” This is when, in our lectionary, I hear God saying to us, you are living in the resurrection time, and you have the Holy Spirit—now go, and do. You have what you need.

This is most directly expressed twice in the Gospel of Matthew, in what are often referred to as the commissioning passages. Two weeks ago, on Trinity Sunday, we heard one of them, the last verses of the Gospel of

Matthew, sometimes called the Great Commission. It is worth rereading these verses here.

Beginning at verse 18 of the 28th chapter, ‘And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”’

Those verses are called the Great Commission, and given pride of place in our lectionary, for the good reason that they have served as a primary guide for Christians throughout history searching for the answer to the question “now what?”

But what is important to remember today is that the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew is not meant to stand alone. The writer of this Gospel assumes that when you hear the Great Commission, you have today's reading in mind. So let's get to it.

Notice that this commissioning passage starts with God. It starts with the compassion that God has for us. "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them..." Make no mistake—we are those crowds. God has compassion for us. That is the ground of our mission, the heart of it. Our work begins and ends in God's love and compassion. Remember that.

Our first task, in response to a loving, compassionate God, is prayer. Jesus teaches the disciples, teaches us, to "ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Pray. Ask.

Next, proclaim. Jesus says, 'proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near."' "

Pray, proclaim. If we do nothing else in our mission, we are called to do those two things. Everything else builds on this foundation.

Then Jesus gives us four things to do, which can be thought of as parts of the proclamation of the good news, because they are signs of the kingdom of heaven. "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."

To be sure, this is a tall order. Yet Jesus tasks the disciples with this work. I leave it to each and every one of us to examine in our hearts what we believe is possible today when we are doing the will of God, when we have faith.

"Cure the sick" surely can mean, at least, relieve the suffering of the sick. Pay attention to the sick. Be loving. Let us receive the compassion of God and practice that compassion with each other.

"Raise the dead" means, at least, practice resurrection. Practice reconciliation, recognize the possibilities for new beginnings, for rebirth, renewal. The world does not need to remain the way it is. We are invited, nay we are called, to participate in the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven, to participate in the renewal, and the rebirth, of this world. Raise the dead despair to new hope, raise the dead cynicism to new faith, raise the dead fear and hatred to new love. Let us receive the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and show forth that good news in our behavior.

"Cleanse the lepers." This can be for us, at least, about outcasts. Cleanse the stigma that separates us. Cleanse that which creates an us and a them, the in-crowd and the outcasts. Cleanse that. Let us receive the communion of Jesus who calls all people to himself and practice that radical communion with each other.

"Cast out demons." There is real evil in the world, and in the human heart, in words and

in actions. Discernment and self-awareness are needed here. Calm, steadiness, resolve—these things will help us. Let us receive the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to identify evil in ourselves and in the systems of oppression in which we may participate, and from which we may benefit, and trust that, with God’s help, we can cast it out. We can do this. We must. We have what we need.

Pray, proclaim. And cure, raise, cleanse, and cast out evil.

If we stop there, we might do well. But history teaches us that it is all too easy for Christians to read the Great Commission, and even to read today’s passage up to this point, and proceed to proclaim not the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near, but instead proclaim and practice cultural imperialism and hegemony—to oppress, to enslave, to kill, all in the name of mission.

The next part of today’s passage can help us refocus our attention on God, to avoid self-righteousness.

Jesus says, “give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff...” This is not just about things. This is about the baggage we carry in our hearts. This is about how we can be tempted, when proclaiming the good news, to care more about how we are perceived, about how proud we can feel to think that we know something special about God that other people might not know. That is self-

righteousness. Let us let that go. We don’t need all that baggage on this journey. It will only distract us and obscure the gospel.

Jesus says, “If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 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.” This means that it is not my job to condemn, to argue and argue until everyone thinks and acts just like me. I don’t have all the answers I might think I do. Any truth in any of us, comes not from us, but from God.

After this point today’s gospel includes many sorrowful things. Keep in mind that the community out of which this gospel arose, encountered much suffering. Simply put, there is trauma that comes through. That trauma can be used by people today to cause more suffering. That is a trap.

What is important for us today is the fact that the proclamation of the good news can be tough, because the gospel can inspire real change in the way things are. And we humans can be tenaciously resistant to change. Telling the truth can divide. The truth can hurt. Jesus here is preparing us for what we may experience when we follow him, when we pray, and proclaim. But remember where we started. Jesus is telling us these things because he has compassion for us.

Jesus says, “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; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Pray. Proclaim. We have what we need.

Matthew 9:35-10:23 [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 laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

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. 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; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 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. 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.

“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. 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; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 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.”]



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL