**2023 The Third Sunday after Pentecost Proper A6**

**June** 18, The Cathedral of the Diocese of Chichester, England.

Mass 11:00 a.m.

Matthew 9: 35-10:8

**Text**: Matthew 10: 1, 5-6

*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.*

*5These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

**Introduction**

I believe the first thing that leaps out at us as we hear the gospel reading is the instructions to the disciples as Jesus sends them out in mission, that they are not to enter non-Jewish territories. The instructions are inconsistent with the general view we have of Jesus. Reading the gospel of Matthew, the instructions of Jesus are even inconsistent with his own ministry which goes beyond the boundaries of race, nationality, and ethnicity. Following the sermon on the mount and leading up to sending out of the disciples we see Jesus engaging and ministering to those of the gentile/ pagan world. He healed the servant of the Roman Centurion (8:5-13) and the Gadarene Demonic. (8:28-34)

One plausible explanation for Jesus’ instructions as he sends out his disciples, is they are sent out to gain practical experience. As disciples they were expected to follow Jesus and to learn (as the word disciple implies) from him. They were being trained to continue the mission of Jesus. On the job training is best done in a familiar context.

The first time I read a lesson in church, was in my home church, I was all nerves, I tried to conceal it, but I shook, and members of the congregation saw it. My first sermon was preached in my home church and by that time I was a little more composed. As I speak to you now, I have some anxiety. We have a saying at home, “that we must learn to dance a yard before we dance aboard.” You probably have a similar expression here which means we must practice at home before venturing out into unknown areas. Speaking for the first time to people of a different congregation, or culture, or history can be nerve racking. The disciple’s initial mission was preparing them for something bigger, the world.

Of note as pointed out by one commentator in Matthew’s gospel it is not until after the resurrection that Jesus commissions the disciples to go to all the nations (28:19) in the Great Commission. The church today is summoned by Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach all people. On the job training is best done in a familiar context.

So, Jesus instructs the disciples,

*‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

**The twelve disciples** sent out were also a mixed group of people. They were from diverse backgrounds, sectors of society with different priorities, ambitions. There were the coarse fishermen, harden by the rough seas and scorching sun. A tax collector, who worked on behalf of the enemy, the Roman authorities, and was despised by his own people, especially by the religious elite. Tax collectors were known to make themselves wealthy from the funds they gained from extortion. Simon the Cananaean, the Zealot, would have been at the other end of the spectrum having difficulty associating with a person who worked on behalf of the system they hoped to topple. Then there was Judas who we know betrayed Jesus. The twelve were a group of people with different temperaments, not always in agreement with each other as we see played out in the gospels.

God calls all kinds of imperfect people into the work of the kingdom. God includes all people to be agents in the mission of the gospel. It does not matter who we are, our condition, or our profession. We may fail God repeatedly like Peter, yet God still enlists and renews us for the mission. Jesus calls all to the work of mission and the church must be open to using all people to advance the cause of Christ.

**Jesus moved with compassion** for the people, described as sheep without shepherd, sends out the twelve to touch and change the lives of people.

They are to reach out to those in need of healing, physical and psychological healing, to those who need to be freed from life encumbrances and to those who are grieving, and who have lost hope. The disciples were in Christ’s name to make a difference in the lives of people, and society as a whole. The disciple is called in the name of Christ to empower people.

We live in a society and world where people are hurting, and God calls us all to be agents of healing and change in our various areas of life. God is raising up people in all areas of life to bring healing and peace in the lives of people. The church must join with other agents and affirm those actions that bring healing and affirm people.

We who receive the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood are to be the extension of Christ’s ministry in the world. Jesus gathers us around His table to feed and strengthen us for his work in the world.

In our Prayers after Holy Communion, we are reminded that the work has just begun, and we are to go empowered by the Holy Spirit into our communities and the world to be Christ’s agents of light, of change, to right the wrongs of our society.

The church exists for God’s mission to the world, that the Kingdoms of this world may become places where God reigns.

**Conclusion.**

Jesus calls us from diverse backgrounds to unite around His table, to be strengthened by his grace to reach out to others in His name.

We are called in Christ’s name to make a difference where we are and beyond. May we hear Christ’s summons for us to go and to be the difference where we are that our society and world may be a place of love and care for all people, especially for the vulnerable.

**Amen.**