



## Sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

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*Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7); Psalm 116:1, 10-17; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)*

God of love and compassion, for whom everything is possible, be in our midst and enlighten us to see those who seek your love. Make us your gracious servants, that the world may know you. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations in all of our hearts be pleasing to You, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The Gospel according to Matthew was written after the Romans had destroyed the Second Temple and Jerusalem in retaliation for an ongoing Jewish revolt. Times were tense! The anonymous gospeler, "Matthew the Tax Collector" was educated, probably a Jewish Christian with some training as a scribe. It is an orderly Gospel, beginning with Jesus' birth and lineage all the way from Abraham, and ending with the passage we read last week, "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.'"

In the several chapters before today's text, Jesus ignored prejudices of his time by performing healing miracles for women, for foreigners, the outcasts, poor, powerless, mentally ill, the unclean. 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." Jesus, looked on the people with "compassion ... because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus – the prophet and healer -- attracted huge crowds like a celebrity rock star would today. The more people Jesus cured, the more people came to him. Jesus was not spread thin, but he knew what would happen when he got to Jerusalem and he wanted to empower his followers to do this important work. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The official title of today's Gospel passage is "The Mission of the Twelve." It will be the disciples' first foray into the world without "the boss" literally by their side and supporting them. In Matthew's gospel the disciples were not ignorant bumbler who 'didn't get Jesus.' They were passionate evangelists with leadership potential in whom Jesus placed his trust and his authority. Jesus summoned his disciples and gave them power like his power, "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and sickness." Jesus assured the disciples that the Gentiles and the Samaritans would come to believing in their own time. Focus on the lost sheep of Israel. "Proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'"

And to ensure that none of the disciples would self-aggrandize, Jesus told them that their power and authority was a gift to be shared pro bono in the community. Room and board if

offered; carry no cash for miscellaneous expenses; no provisions, no change of clothes, no weapons. Jesus told them to discover who were faithful and stay there. If they are “worthy, let your peace come upon them,” otherwise, “let your peace return to you.” The disciples were not to dwell on failures, or to worry about the future, but to live in the present. And woe be to anyone who does “not welcome you or listen to your words.” Because when the kingdom of heaven comes, the worthy will recognize it and eagerly accept it. But if they do not, let it go and move on. They will be the sorry ones.

“I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” There are predators on the road and Jesus’ followers will be their targets. “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” to be made an example. The disciples should not be naïve and think that the power they use on behalf of others will also save them. They must tell the truth anyway.

Jesus’ message to his disciples was and is controversial. The good news, that God’s love does not discriminate against the disenfranchised; that God’s love is available to all; is not a popular message to those who are in charge; those who want to be exclusive. The councils, governors and kings didn’t like Jesus’ message of equity and love and neither did they like it coming from Jesus’ followers. Jesus’ followers must tell the truth anyway.

There are those who want to kill the messengers, but the message must be delivered and we are Jesus’ followers. We, you and I, right here and right now are Jesus’ messengers. We must tell the truth. Let us find our courage to fearlessly proclaim the good news to all who will listen. That is our job. Do you think if we used different language for the tasks of ministry, the tasks of discipleship, that we would actually be empowered to do them? Do you think if we named the demons, we could cast them out?

I want to bring this message home with some words from Anna Carter Florence, Professor of Preaching at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, and a presenter at the 2020 Festival of Homiletics that I attended – livestreamed from Atlanta, GA -- last month. Just four things, Jesus says to his followers; only four: “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

Cure the sick. Do not ignore the poisons that intoxicate us – addictions, anger, apathy, contempt, fear, greed, indifference. Name your own poison. Proclaim the power of God to heal.

Raise the dead. Do not leave us in our tombs or sitting comfortably in our “pews” – wearing our blinders to injustices in the world, in our nation, in our community, in the church. How are you entombed? Proclaim the power of God to raise us up.

Cleanse the lepers. Do not abandon the outcast in their misery – refugees, the poor, the homeless, those with mental illness, the forgotten, the abandoned. What hurts can you heal? Proclaim the power of God to restore us to beloved community.

Cast out demons. Do not accept demonic powers of evil – name them -- all ‘isms’ – anti-Semitism, fascism, materialism, racism, sexism; and phobias – homophobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia. What demons are heavy in your heart and soul? Proclaim the power of God to cast them out.

The core of our Christian faith is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is always as near as God’s love and God’s love is for everyone. “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.”

Amen.