

St Mark's Lutheran Church Sermon  
Vicar Joseph Theodorsen  
Matthew 9:35-10:8  
Second Sunday after Pentecost

## **Introduction**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As I reflect upon my time here at St Mark's, I can't help but be filled with an incredible sense of privilege. It has been such a wonderful journey of growth and encouragement for me - a time of great joy and learning. And what a fitting text we have from the Gospel reading for today to bring my time with you to a close.

As Jesus sent out the 12 on their first mission, in some sense, from today I will be sent out by you to continue in preparation for service to the Church. In my final sermon as your Vicar, I want to bring out three points of mission from this text that apply not only to me as one being sent by you, but to all of us in the Church: The heart of mission, the head of mission, and us as the people of mission. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the Truth, your Word is Truth. Amen.

## **The heart of mission**

The 12 Apostles: handpicked by Christ to become his representatives on earth. I wonder if we could consider their time with him up to this point as their vicarage? They have followed him throughout the cities and towns of Israel, sitting at his feet to hear his teaching, witnessing him in action. Now, they are commissioned with his authority to join him in his mission of salvation. A fantastic model for training, one that I am glad to have had the opportunity to undertake with Pastor Ben. But training alone cannot prepare us for the mission that we are called to.

What formed the foundation for Christ's teaching, healing, and outreach was not that he knew what to teach, or that he had the power to heal and cast out demons. The basis for his mission was the heart that he had for his people - his compassion.

Compassion literally means to suffer with, and this encapsulates so well the whole of Christ's life and mission on this earth. As Jesus looks upon the people who continually followed him about, he has compassion on them. He sees them harassed and helpless. The language Matthew uses here was that they had been flayed, their skin torn, and cast down as corpses lying on the ground - graphic imagery.

The people had been so led astray by the religious authorities and the burden of their laws that demanded more than they could possibly give, that they were like lost, wounded sheep - wandering, exhausted, helpless. The heart of the Good Shepherd was deeply moved by the sight. His compassion spurred him to action - action that ultimately led him to the cross. This heart of Christ for his people is the heart of mission.

The thing is, this is not something that can be taught, not even by a Vicar Father - sorry Pastor Ben... It's not a natural state for us, is it? How often are our hearts turned inwards toward ourselves, considering our own wants and needs before those of others? We need something to transform them, to change their state altogether. And, centuries before Christ came, He promised to do just that.

'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;' we read in Ezekiel 'I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' That's exactly what we celebrated two weeks ago on Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit, given in our Baptism, changes our hearts from within.

## **The head of mission**

It seems that mission isn't something that comes completely naturally to us, though, even with our new hearts. We can see this in the number of programs, activities and training events that churches set up in order to help people with this part of the Christian life. I know that personally I don't always feel capable of simply proclaiming the good news to the lost, and I'm sure that some of you struggle with this as well. We know the harvest is plentiful, we see the state of the world all the time. Violence, poverty, godlessness is everywhere we look. But we struggle to act upon what we see. There is good news for us!

It's important that we always remember that God Himself is the head of this mission. Notice what Jesus says to his disciples when he is moved by the sight of the crowds? He doesn't just command his disciples to immediately go out and begin the harvest, but rather he urges them to plead with God, not just ask, but beg, beseech *Him* to send out harvesters into *His* field.

We might be tempted to look at the task of reaching the lost and become overwhelmed. Indeed, it *is* impossible at a human level. But remember what Christ said about the rich man being saved? 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' He doesn't send us on a mission doomed to failure, after all, it's His mission. Just as he did with his Apostles, he equips us for the task at hand, and it is His work that He accomplishes through us.

Now we might not all be equipped as those on the frontlines, sent off into the world to spread the good news, accompanied by signs and wonders. That doesn't mean we don't have a part to play, though. The prayer that Christ calls us to is a vital part of this mission. Even if we aren't capable directly of going out to all nations, baptising them and teaching them as Christ charged, he ensures that his Church is.

You might remember how I talked about Paul's favourite analogy of the Church as the body of Christ at Pentecost. How each part has its own role to play. We're not all mouths and tongues, some have been gifted for this particular work and some haven't. But we have all been given the ability to ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers to send out. It's important that we do this. Earnestly plead with Him. James writes that we do not have because we do not ask God, may this never be a charge against us.

## **The people of mission**

It's also important to remember that mission isn't only about going off into the four corners of the earth. Don't think that you are failing Christ's command to mission because you have never been to a far-off land to spread the Word. There are many people here in our own country, city, and even families that are a part of the harvest. And don't forget that we, also, are a part of this harvest! We are now joined to this mission because, while we were still lost and wandering sheep, the Good Shepherd raised up people in our lives to work His mercy in us.

And now, simply by being a Christian, coming together (when we're allowed to!) and living according to the new hearts we have been given, we are serving as Christ's missionaries. No small number of people have come to faith through the humble witness of the Christian life.

It's often through simple, genuine relationships that effective mission happens. When we love our neighbours and care for them with the heart of Christ, we open up wonderful opportunities to proclaim the Kingdom of God into their lives.

When we give up our Sunday mornings to worship, when we attend a study, or whenever we take time out of this busy world to give it to God, we show people that, for us, there's something else that drives us, that gives our life hope and purpose. By communing together, something I pray we'll be able to do again soon, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. And when we unite together to make our common confession, we speak this out into the world.

You may be aware that in recent days, two of our saints have passed from this life. We have lost Neil Launer and Ivy Marsh to the evil of death. Yet even in this time of great sadness as we mourn their passing, we show the world that not even death can take from us the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Our sorrow is not final, and we can rejoice in our sadness that the day will come when we are once again reunited with those who have passed in faith.

### **Conclusion**

As I now go to pack up my office and prepare to return to a life of study to end the year, I pray that these three things will help to sustain you in your mission in the world: Nurture the heart of Christ that you have been given, a genuine love and compassion for the lost. Don't rely on your own strength and power to conduct your mission, but pray and trust that God will provide the means. And never forget that wherever you are, whoever you are with, your life with Christ is a witness to his amazing work in you.

And finally, please continue to pray for me and my family. The road ahead of us is not an easy one, and yet I believe that God has used this time with you to grow me significantly into the servant that He wants me to be. Thank you for allowing Pastor Ben to have me as his vicar, for the wonderful encouragement and support that you have all shown me, and for the way you welcomed us into your community with open arms and made us truly feel like your brothers and sisters in Christ. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.