

**Sunday, June 14, 2020**  
**Second Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 6 (Year A)**

Matthew 9.35—10.20

*The Rev. Michael K. Fincher*

*Service Live Streamed at:*

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregoryslongbeach/videos/956135554829039/>

*(Sermon begins at about 13:20)*

**“Those Who Are Sent: ‘We’ve Got This!’”**

As I read the Gospel lesson for today, I am reminded of the Gospel lesson for last Sunday. In the Gospel for Trinity Sunday, Jesus gave his disciples what is known as the Great Commission: “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 ages” (Mt 28.19-20). These are Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples following his resurrection and immediately before his ascension. That they are to make disciples of all nations. ALL nations. Jews and Gentiles alike.

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus is also sending out the disciples for ministry. Recognizing great need among the people, Jesus tells them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Mt 9.37). He then gives his disciples “authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure disease and every sickness” (Mt 10.1)—the beginning of what is often called the mission discourse. In his instructions before sending them on their way, Jesus tells them “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10.5b-7).

Jesus’ commissioning to the disciples here is far more limited than the commission he gives them immediately prior to his ascension. While it’s hard to pin down the exact timeline for any of the Gospels, it is reasonable to assume that the events of today’s Gospel reading took place during the second year of Jesus’ public ministry, a year or more before his death and resurrection. Here, his commissioning is limited in scope, focusing solely on a ministry of healing and exorcism, a ministry that is directed solely to the Jews. But, a year later, as he prepares to ascend to heaven, his commissioning is far more expansive—sending them to make disciples of all nations. Not just to heal a subset of humanity as he commands in today’s Gospel, but to bring the fullness of humanity into full inclusion in God’s kingdom. It’s almost as if this scene today is a trial run. That this is the first step in their preparation for a broader mission. That this is preparing them for what they are ultimately meant to do.

As we are all aware—particularly the educators among us—education and preparation are a matter of small steps, of building blocks. Each step, each task, leading to and preparing for a larger step, a more difficult task. If Jesus had told the disciples off the bat that they would be expected to make disciples of all nations, they would have responded, “yeah, right! You’re out of your mind if you think we could do that!” So, he started them off with baby steps. So that when they did eventually get to the end of their education, their preparation, and he tells them that they are to make disciples of all nations, they would be able to look back, see what they had accomplished, and proclaim, “we’ve got this!”

Before the disciples can get to that place, before they are ready for the endgame, they need to learn a few lessons. And that is precisely what this sending of the disciples is meant to teach them, to prepare them for. Jesus' instructions in the latter half of today's Gospel are meant to convey something about what they are to do and how they are to do it.

The first lesson is not really in the instructions Jesus gives the disciples, but is subtly conveyed in the description of who he calls to this ministry. Notice that Matthew's description says, "These are the names of the twelve apostles . . ." Apostles, not disciples. Apostles is a term that literally means "sent ones." These are not just disciples—followers who sit around and learn about ministry. They are apostles—those who are sent to actually do ministry. In using this terminology, the Gospel is sending a subtle, yet all important, message. Mission is not optional. It is critical to Jesus' work. It is the very reason the disciples and the church exist. Not to just sit around and gaze at their navels, but to be sent out to do ministry.

The second lesson has to do with balancing concern about the work they are doing with concern for their own needs. Jesus tells them "take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff" (Mt. 10.10). In other words, they are not to be concerned with those things that would distract them or detract from their mission. They are to focus their attention on the work they are sent to do, to not worry about their material needs, and to trust that those will be taken care of. They are to rely on the goodwill of those whom they seek to minister to—which in that culture was pretty much a given, part of the social contract of the day. And the unwritten part of that statement is that, first and foremost, they are to trust and rely on God. God will provide them with what they need to successfully complete their mission.

The third lesson has to do with how they are to approach the work itself. Jesus tells them, "Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave . . . 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" (Mt 10.11, 14). In other words, they are to remain committed to and persevere in their ministry, not run off at the first hiccup they encounter. They are to offer their message of the coming kingdom as a free gift, without pressure or coercion. They are to stay and continue that work as long as there is a possibility of success. Only if their message is rejected should they move on. If rejected, they are not to take it personally and rather put the situation behind them.

And the fourth lesson is that ministry is hard work. Some will readily accept what is offered. But some will reject it. Some may even be hostile to receiving what is offered. As Jesus tells the disciples, "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" (Mt 10.19b-20). The work is ultimately God's. Those who do the ministry are merely instruments to be used by God in the doing of that work. All we can do is be faithful and do our best. The rest is up to God.

Applying Jesus' instructions to those first disciples, to those first apostles, to those who were first sent in his name, we are to remember that we, too, are apostles. We are sent out in

Christ's name to proclaim the message of the coming kingdom. To proclaim the Good News of the Gospel in word and action. When we undertake this work, we are to do so without letting concerns for our own needs deter or hinder us; trusting that in our faithfulness, God will take care of us and provide us with what we need. We are to remember that what we offer to people will be accepted by some, but may not be accepted by others. And that is okay. Ours is to be faithful to the work. To continue to minister to those who are willing to receive what we offer. Trusting that God is working through us and that God gives us what we need to do that work.

As I read of the first account of Jesus sending his followers out into the world to minister in his name, I am reminded that 65 years ago this past Friday, another ministry first occurred. On that day, June 12, 1955, another group of the faithful—31 in total—gathered for the first time to worship at Minnie Gant Elementary School. On that day, Fr. Michael Francis was named vicar of the newly formed community of faith. Three days later—65 years ago tomorrow—the community met again in a congregational meeting and selected a name: St. Gregory's.

This was the beginning of our own journey as those sent out into the world, to minister to the growing city of Long Beach. It was not easy work, developing and growing a faith community in a city that already had three other Episcopal congregations. But God provided. Thanks to the diligent efforts of one of their own—one of our own who is still with us—Bill Dalessi found the last piece of vacant property in the city zoned for a church. He persuaded the Diocese of Los Angeles to acquire the property at 6201 East Willow Street for the future home of St. Gregory's. And with the help of St. Luke's, St. Thomas of Canterbury, and All Saints, this place became a reality. Just under two years after the first meeting of the faithful, after their leap of faith to accept Christ's call to be sent into the world, ground was broken for a new church. And six months later, the newly constructed church—what we know as Francis Hall, named after the first vicar and rector—was dedicated.

Despite the difficult prospect of founding yet one more Episcopal congregation in a town that already had three to choose from, despite what was undoubtedly hard work and personal sacrifice on their part, the founders of St. Gregory's Church heard Jesus' call to be sent forth. They persevered, trusting that they were living into God's call, that they were continuing Christ's mission. They had faith in and trusted God to guide and support them in their sacred work. And 65 years later, St. Gregory's continues to persevere, continues to trust God to guide us in our ongoing ministry in this community. To be a place of hospitality. To be a place that cares for the needs of the marginalized in our community. To be a place that proclaims the Good News of God's love in word and action.

In his opening words to his disciples, Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." In our own time, the harvest continues to be plentiful. There is still lots of work to be done. Perhaps more now than ever. And the laborers are few. Even fewer than they have been in times past. But you know what? That just means that the work we do is even more important than ever. Our Lord continues to call us to be those who are sent into the world to do that work. Like those first apostles, like the founders of St. Gregory's 65 years ago, we joyfully accept the calling as those who are sent and continue to proclaim, "the kingdom of God has come near!"

And just as those first apostles went on to more expansive forms of ministry—moving from healing among Jews to making disciples of all nations—so too are we called to continually expand our mission and ministry. And we have done that over the 65 years of our history. Those first 65 years have taught us what it means to be sent, to engage in Christ’s ministry. Those first 65 years have prepared us for even greater things, for more expansive forms of ministry. As we move into the next 65 years, we can be assured that God continues to provide and to lead us into whatever is next; that Jesus is with us always, to the end of the ages.

And with that foundation, that support, we ourselves can proclaim, “We’ve got this!”