

Sunday, June 14, 2026
Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6A)
Matthew 9.35—10.23
The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

“Jesus & Associates”

As most of you know, before I became a priest I had a previous life as a transportation planner and traffic engineer. Part of my time was spent working for a transportation planning consulting firm and the latter part of it was working for a larger environmental consulting firm. Of course, consulting firms have to have a business name to operate. One of the most common naming schemas (at least at the time) was the name of the founder of the firm followed by “associates” or “and associates.” An associate being a coworker or business partner, depending on context. During the course of my career, I first worked for Ausin and Associates. When that firm merged with another one, we became Austin Foust Associates. I then left AFA and went to work for LSA. LSA had originally stood for Larry Seeman Associates, but after Larry retired and we became an employee-owned company, the name was shortened to LSA to honor the founder, but also to provide business and reputational continuity.

While younger and working for Austin and Associates and then Austin Foust Associates, I obviously knew I was one of the “associates,” but also always felt that the term implied a lesser position, a lesser status. I always knew that I was a mere employee and that the profits and real benefits accrued to the men who were the actual owners of the firm. But then when I went to LSA, the business model was different by virtue of being an employee-owned firm. We were all, from entry-level employees up to principals (the upper management), regarded as “associates” in the fullest sense of the term. While we each may have been at different levels in the corporate hierarchy and each had different amounts of time in the firm and money vested in employee stock ownership, we were all equal in the sense of being partners in the firm and having a vested interest in how well the firm did. When you know that the overall value of the company, which translates into compensation adjustments, bonuses, and retirement benefits, is dependent in part on your efforts, that makes a huge difference. You truly feel an integral part of the whole operation as opposed to feeling like you are merely a replaceable “cog in the wheel.” The sense of partnership tends to make you willing to go the extra mile.

It is through this lens of twenty years in private sector consulting before becoming a priest that I view today’s Gospel reading. Jesus said to his disciples, “‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few’ . . . 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.” To my way of thinking, collectively known as . . . Jesus & Associates.

Seriously, that is indeed how I view this passage. Jesus, recognizing that there is more work to be done than he can possibly do as one man—even if he is also divine. He needs help getting it all done. And so he organizes the disciples to provide the assistance he needs. But notice how he organizes the associates, I mean, the apostles. They are not merely employees, cogs in a

wheel, with benefits accruing solely to Jesus. He “gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” He did not just tell them what to do. He gave them authority to make their own decisions. He gave them the power they needed to do the job that needed to be done.

After organizing the apostles, which literally means “ones who are sent,” Jesus then sends them out. Not before giving them some basic instructions. First off, don’t go near those Gentiles or Samaritans. Only go the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” While it may sound exclusionary, it does make sense. Start off with those whom you already know religiously and culturally, those who were most like them. Trying to minister to those of completely different backgrounds was probably adding a layer of complexity they were not ready for. That they had no experience with. At least, not yet. In time, under Jesus’ mentorship and example, they would gain that level of experience and the associated gifts and talents to expand the range of those they ministered to. To the point that, as you recall from Trinity Sunday, right before his Ascension Jesus commissions the apostles, “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” (Mt 28.19-20). Opening up the entire world for ministry, Samaritans and Gentiles included.

Jesus then gives them some operational guidelines. You know, the basic job description: “Proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” Just reiterating what he told them when he commissioned them as apostles. Then he tells them, “You received without payment; give without payment.” This is ministry to those in need, to those who are most often the poor and marginalized of society. This is not a money-making venture. They will have their needs met in other ways. Largely through the prevailing norms of hospitality inherent in the culture and society of the day. Since many villages lacked inns for travelers, those passing through relied on the hospitality of the locals. Sometimes paying, but sometimes exchanging labor or services for room and board (which is what Jesus later alludes to). It’s just what one did, knowing they themselves would benefit from the hospitality of strangers when they travelled.

What is strange, at least to our ears, is what Jesus says next. “Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff.” That is just crazy talk. Who, getting ready to go on a trip, would not at least take some basic supplies? Why would Jesus insist the apostles not carry at least the barest of essentials? While a bit puzzling, I would venture that this is all part of their training as entry-level apostles. That in order to engage in ministry, they first needed to learn to be vulnerable. They themselves needed to learn to rely on others, they needed to become those in need of assistance, before they could begin to help others who were in true need of their services. Again, a little easier in that day and age than our own, given the inherent code of hospitality to strangers. Hence, Jesus’ statement, “Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment” than for any town that rejects the apostles. While a different sermon, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah that led to their destruction in Genesis Chapter 19 had absolutely nothing to do with perceived sexual immorality and everything to do with failure to provide hospitality.

But back to the lack of basic supplies for the apostles' upcoming business trip. Another reason for not taking any supplies may well have been that taking extra bags and tunics and sandals and staffs and other stuff would just get in the way. They are things that have to be taken care of and watched and looked after and protected. Taking valuable time and energy that could be better used for ministry itself. In short, having lots of other stuff becomes a distraction from what truly needs to be done. By not having those distractions—within reason, depending on context, of course—we are better able to devote what is needed to the ministry at hand. To give it our all.

Although I would posit there was another more important reason why Jesus told the apostles to go without any provisions. To teach them what is perhaps the most fundamental lesson when it comes to engaging in ministry. That when we engage in ministry, we are to rely on God first and foremost. God provides us with everything we need to do the ministry we have been called to. Certainly that the gifts and talents needed for ministry are provided by God. But also, that we ultimately draw our energy and strength from God. Ministry can be draining, in the best of conditions. Requiring the expending of energy that, at times, may exceed what we otherwise have available. And yet, we somehow always seem to have enough. I don't know how many times I have been wiped out and thought I had no energy, but when called to engage in some aspect of ministry, particularly to another in obvious need, I realized after the fact that I had been given the strength and energy I needed in the moment. That can only have been provided by God's grace.

In the remainder of his instructions to the apostles, Jesus continually implies the same message. That in all we do when it comes to ministry, to focus on what needs to be done, to not be distracted, and to trust that God gives us what we need in the moment to engage in the work that is being done on his behalf. Admittedly, the latter part of these instructions does sound a little scary: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Jesus goes on to talk about some of the potentials for persecution. While not as likely in our own time and culture, certainly a very present danger as the apostles engaged in their work. Certainly a very present danger as the early Church grew into what we know it to be today. Which has, by and large, moved beyond those dangers. Although, again, all depending on context.

And yet, this does continue to provide us with a cautionary statement that ministry can be and often is, hard. There are potential pitfalls. There is always the looming potential for the lack of available resources. All while the need for sharing God's love in a broken and hurting world continues to be more prevalent than ever. As noted at the start of the Gospel reading, the people "were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Which is why Jesus 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." Over the last two thousand years, the number of those who are harassed and helpless has only increased. And while the number of laborers has increased as well, at times, it still seems inadequate. It seems a vicious cycle.

As those who follow Jesus, as members of the Body of Christ, we are the ones now called to be the laborers of God's harvest. Just as Jesus called his twelve disciples to be apostles, to be those sent into the world in his name, so too are we called to be apostles, sent out to minister in his name. As one commentator notes regarding this work we are called into: "The Messiah has

come, as it turns out, not to solve humanity's problems for us, but to encourage and empower us to solve them, in effect recruiting us into becoming full participants in God's work of love and redemption."¹

We have what we need for the ministry we are called to and that we are engaged in. And, even though it may not always seem like it in the moment, that is enough. Precisely because we do what we do not as individuals, but as members of the Body of Christ. Called into partnership with our God and Christ, and guided, energized, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to do just this work. Called to be fully vested partners in Jesus & Associates.

¹ "Anything Too Wonderful: SALT's Commentary for Third Sunday after Pentecost," SALT, June 8, 2026. <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/6/9/tenacious-hope-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-second-week-after-pentecost>.