

"Ask the Lord of the Harvest"

Matthew 9:35-10:8

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³⁵Then 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. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

¹Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

²These 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; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

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. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Prayer.

Have you ever found yourself being the one doing all the work, while everyone else stands back and watches or complains?

Twenty-five years ago this summer, I was on the maintenance staff of Casowasco, an United Methodist Conference Center and Camp, on Owasco Lake 15 miles south of Auburn, NY. It was a summer job between college school years. Though I was inexperienced, I was young, in shape, and eager to learn. Our boss knew construction, and was a great teacher. 25 years ago was a summer dedicated to roofing, where we replaced flat roofs – not ideal in upstate

New York – we replace flat roofs on many of the buildings with sloped “hip” roofs.

One of the other guys on the staff was a preacher's kid by the name of Bob. He talked constantly, just like his father. Bob talked all day long and didn't know when to stop. He was also very smart; a physics major from the University of Rochester, and, last I knew, he was a professor at Ohio State. But Bob worked in one speed: slow.

One day we are hurrying to get the trusses set, the plywood down, and a plastic cover over top because rain was coming. We had all worked like dogs all day long, and the storm clouds were bearing down on us. I was sweating like a pig, balancing on a ladder – which makes me uncomfortable in the first place – handing up a piece of plywood, and there I spy Bob, sitting on the peak of the roof casually hammering in a nail, talking, talking, talking. The boss sees that look on my face and turns to Bob and says, “Bob, do you have an off switch?”

You'd think he'd shut his mouth, get off his backside, and pitch in with the rest of us. The pause in his dialog was barely perceptible ... “some people know when to shut-up,” he said, “I'm just not one of them.”

And he kept right on talking.

Jesus is working. He's been working hard since about Matthew 4:23, which states “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.” For about five chapters of Matthew, Jesus is working like a one-armed paper hanger, teaching where ever he went, healing and curing the masses who sought him out. The more he worked, the more demand there was for him to meet, the larger the crowds became.

The sweat is dripping in his eyes, he's tired and worn, and he looks up. He sees the crowds and “had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless.” (Matthew 9:36). Jesus looks up, and sees the shabby looking disciples who have made the decision and commitment to drop everything to come and learn from him.

He looks at students, but he sees "apostles."

In the only occasion in Matthew where the term "apostles" is used, it is used here. Disciples are those taught. But Jesus isn't looking at disciples. He sees Apostles, those sent out. Jesus looks up and sees a willing and helping hand for his mission and ministry.

Let's take a look at the Jesus' unlikely band of co-conspirators: "first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him." (Matthew 10:2-4). The majority on this list are so quiet and unassuming that the Gospel authors can not agree on who they were. After all, can any of you tell me what James, son of Alphaeus, ever did to follow through on Christ's call?

Three names jump out at me, as they probably do for you, too.

The first is Peter; the first, the greatest, most outspoken, the eager, but wholly dimwitted Rock; the solid foundation upon which Jesus built his church. Peter doesn't understand the message until long after the fact. His faith is filled with sinking doubts, an over-eager tendency to resort to ear slicing violence, and a major trait for denying association with his closest friends just to save his own skin. Who-hoo!

Peter kneels before him, and Jesus gives him the commission, "go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matthew 10:7-8). Good help is hard to find, so you use what you have.

The second name to stick out at me is Matthew. The Gospel author tells us a short phrase about himself. He says, "Matthew the tax collector." Jesus reaches out to a vile, hated, gentile ... and enlists him in his mission and ministry to the crowds. Jesus gives him power to cure the sick, raise the dead, even to cast out demons.

Can you just imagine how Matthew would have been received by the Jewish crowds? Here he was a tax agent for the hated Romans one minute, the next minute, he is on the Jesus lecture circuit? What's with that? People came to see Jesus, dog-gone-it. They wouldn't want any two-bit substitution.

Jesus gives him the commission, "go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matthew 10:7-8). Good help is hard to find, so you use what you have.

And then there is the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. There's Judas; Judas Iscariot. The Gospel author is certain to plaster that hole in the wall when he describes Judas as "Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him." O yea! There's a little bit of hind sight predijust going on here.

2,000 years later we are left to believe that either Jesus was an incredibly poor judge of human character- to choose Judas Iscariot to be one of his apostles, or, that Jesus even sent out his worst enemy to work miracles in his name.

I choose to believe the later; that Jesus sent Judas Iscariot out to work miracles for God's kingdom. Jesus gives Judas the same commission he gave everyone else, "go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matthew 10:7-8). Good help is hard to find, so you use what you have.

The rest of them, few barely remember their names. And here we have Peter, the dull witted denial making deal maker; Matthew, the hated tax collecting gentile; and Judas Iscariot, the suicidal betrayer **all lined up and ready to be Jesus' Apostles**, his teachers and miracle workers, his much needed relief.

If it were a logical argument, Jesus would loose hands down. If this was a cognitive exercise, Jesus would have failed. It would appear that Jesus is choosing all the wrong people upon which to build his church. Yet, with this small group of 3rd rate Apostles, they build the Church which changed the world.

Faith defies logic. Belief can not be organized, legislated, or required. What one

feels can't be measured. Jesus goes with who he has, with what ever skills each of us may bring to the table.

My point is that if Jesus could build a church and deploy it in his mission with the twelve sorry excuses he had for Apostles, imagine what Jesus can be doing with us here today. Image what work Jesus is already doing with the people of Zion.

You don't think you're capable of being an Apostle? You can't be any worse than Peter.

You don't think you're able to preach, teach, heal, or raise from the dead? You can't be any more offensive than Matthew.

You find it impossible to see yourself taking your faith and stepping it up a notch? For goodness sake, you have got a lot more going for you than Judas ever did.

It's time to get off the peek of the roof. Quit complaining. Let's pull together in our little band known as Zion, just like that little band known as disciples long ago. Let us come together as modern day Apostles serving the Church of Jesus Christ. It's time for each and everyone of us to pitch in and lend Jesus a hand. He needs our help. Let's be sure he gets it.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.