

“Sent”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday June 14, 2020

Matthew 9:35-10:23

I’ve had my laptop for quite a while now, and on it I have the files from sermons from my last computer, as well as all the files saved on this present computer.

All that to say that as far back as I can tell, about 15 years, anyway, I’ve never preached on this passage from Matthew’s gospel.

I think I haven’t because though it is so full of interesting possible themes to explore – it is at the same time a little overwhelming.

Where does one begin with a passage like this?

One of the writers I appreciate very much, Dr. David Lose, in reflecting on this passage says it doesn’t matter so much what we focus on in this text, or where we start, but what is important is that we do start.

And in his reflections on the text he makes all kinds of connections with the happenings in the world, and specifically in race relations in the United States.

Dr. Lose does a good job of letting the word of God speak, trusting that the Holy Spirit will give us ears to hear, and hearts to understand what that word means to us today.

So let us pray for God’s help in hearing this word well, and be helped to live this day to the glory of God.

God, our helper,

by your Holy Spirit open our minds

and lead us into your truth

for the sake of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

The passage begins: *“Then 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.”* ³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

Who was Jesus, what did he do?

Here’s a snapshot.

He travelled through cities and villages, teaching and proclaiming good news.

He cured people of every sickness.

As he walked the streets, and met with the masses he saw them as sheep in need of a shepherd.

In the Bible that phrase “Harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd” was the description of God’s people when they didn’t have a prophet or judge to speak God’s word to them, to guide them in God’s ways.

The people of God were troubled, distressed, harassed, without leadership, without a word from God.

Jesus sees them- he sees all the needs of the people- and he has compassion for them.

What is compassion?

I found a couple of what I thought was good definitions – compassion is caring and a willingness to help others.

Compassion motivates people to help.

Compassion is both a feeling of care or concern, but it is more than just seeing – it is seeing and feeling concern, then moving to respond in some kind of helpful action.

Do we see any situations in the world where people look like sheep that are harassed and hurting?

Any places where good leadership is needed?

The example of Jesus is first compassion, and then bringing healing and help, and teaching to incarnate that compassion.

After teaching and healing, seeing the people as sheep in need of the Good Shepherd, Jesus said to his disciples; ***“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”***

Jesus calls his disciples together to pray.

There is a lot of work to be done – there is great need amongst God’s people.

There is much that can be done, there is a great harvest ready – pray for workers.

And then the disciples are the answer their own prayers.

If God is calling you to pray about something, to pray for someone, God may ask **you** to be part of the answer to that prayer.

Jesus then sent his disciples out to do just as Jesus did.

The disciples’ message and actions – teaching and healing ministry was the same as Jesus’.

How do we respond to the crisis in the world around us?

I think we should take a page from Jesus.

He lived and worked and healed, and talked and knew people.

He saw them.

He saw what was happening to them- and he saw them with compassion.

Jesus brought healing and wholeness, teaching and leading to the people, and he sent his disciples out to do the same thing.

They went far and wide.

They were equipped by Jesus.

It wasn't about their tools, or expertise, they didn't take any extras, they went with Jesus' authority, they went as he had instructed, and equipped with what they had seen and heard from Jesus.

Freely they had received from Jesus, and freely they would share the message of healing and life to any who would receive them and their message.

The disciples were given food and lodging by those who would receive them, labourers receive their living for their work.

First they were sent to the lost sheep of Israel.

Eventually they were sent out to the ends of the earth.

The first to oppose their message were their own people.

It's not easy speaking God's word.

There are always some who will oppose it, who will not hear the truth, who do not want others to receive healing and compassion.

The disciples were not a homogeneous group.

There were zealots and tax collectors, and everything between- the zealots were ready to overthrow Rome, while the tax collectors were making a profit off the empire.

They were at the opposite ends of the spectrum politically, and yet Jesus called them to himself, and to his mission.

Jesus' disciples had not been with him a long time, but already they were being sent out to the villages and towns around them, and entrusted with Jesus' authority to live and act and teach as Jesus did.

It is not very different today.

We have people of every political stripe in our congregation, there are many ways that we are different, and we may differ on innumerable issues and bring different experiences and perspectives to bear, yet God entrusts us to proclaim the good news in word, but also in deed: “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

See the pain and hurt and unheard laments, of the people around us, and view the world not in fear but with compassion as Jesus did.

We are all entrusted with this mission and together we respond with compassion, and kindness – and the message of the kingdom that is ours to share.

Thanks be to God.