

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
June 14, 2020 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Year A Matthew 9:35—10:8

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Summer has arrived! We have celebrated the festival days of Pentecost and Holy Trinity and now we begin the long season in the church year known as Ordinary Time. Our church life follows the rhythm of the school year with programs beginning in September and wrapping up in May. So, for us, summer is really not ordinary. It's the time when life can slow down a bit, the days are longer and we have more free time to spend with family and friends.

As the restrictions from this spring begin to lift, we can move about a little more freely, even as we remain cautious and vigilant about handwashing and keeping as much social distance as possible. But in this part of the world, it is a relief to be able to get outside more and enjoy the beauty of God's creation.

Ordinary Time in the calendar of the church coincides with summer pretty well. It serves as a time of growth in our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. This first week of Ordinary Time sends us out with the Twelve Disciples to proclaim the good news and bring Christ's healing presence to others.

These are the two tasks the disciples are given—proclaim and heal. This is what Jesus has been up to so far in Matthew's gospel. In Chapter 5 Jesus preaches his famous Sermon on the Mount, declaring blessings on the meek and lowly and teaching what the kingdom of heaven is all about. And at the beginning of our reading for today, Jesus has been teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and sickness.

The disciples have been there. They have heard his words and seen his power, and now Jesus sends them out to bring these same gifts to others. And as we see ourselves as followers of Jesus, and disciples who learn from him, we can easily place ourselves in this calling and add our names to this list of laborers sent into the Lord's harvest.

Notice that Jesus sends the disciples to a very specific audience—"the lost sheep of the house of Israel." These are their people, their families, friends, and neighbors. Last week we read the end of Matthew's gospel when the risen Christ sends these same disciples into all the world, baptizing and teaching all that Jesus had commanded them.

But today, in chapter 10, this is their first chance to be messengers of the gospel and Jesus sends them to those they know best. And the same is true for us.

Most of us will not go to another country to be a missionary for Jesus. Although I hope some of you who still have plenty of time to make the choice to do that will consider opportunities for mission, even if it's just for a season. But all of us are called to speak and bring Christ's healing presence to the people that we are with every day.

We have two tasks—proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near and heal those who are hurting. Let's look at each of those tasks.

How might we proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven? What could we say?

Have you ever seen a “red letter” Bible? I found one in the Fireside room this week. A “red letter” Bible is one in which everything Jesus says is printed in red so it’s easy to go through it to see what Jesus has to say that we might also share with others.

- “Blessed are the meek, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
- “Become as little children.”
- “Do not be afraid.”
- “And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.”

Proclaiming the kingdom of heaven coming near is being able to tell the stories and teachings of Jesus. Just like the beginning of our gospel passage today when Jesus had compassion for the crowd, because they were harassed and helpless, there are dozens of stories of Jesus noticing and caring for those who lost or ignored or even hated. Jesus’ words and the stories that tell of his love for all people are the message of the kingdom of heaven we have to share.

And just as Jesus has been curing every disease, he sends his disciples out to do the same—to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons.

Now I would guess that most of us don’t have these kinds of healing powers, but we do have the power to at least try to heal some of the brokenness and pain we see in the world around us. What might that look like?

We can focus on the relationships we have with family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors, beginning with listening to one another to learn what it’s like to see the world through their eyes. The divide between races in our country has become the top news again. This is an opportunity for us to hear the stories of those whose lives are different from ours.

Maybe that means listening to someone of another race or ethnicity. Maybe it’s hearing what it’s like to have a chronic illness, food sensitivity, or physical limitation. Maybe I’m being called to hear what it’s like to be a single parent or to have a child who is trapped by an addiction. Healing begins when we listen to each other to learn about life from someone else’s experience.

Healing continues when we find ways to stay in the uncomfortable places with those who are harassed and helpless, as Jesus described the crowds. We stand in solidarity with those who are hurting when we are interested in them, when we care about what happens to them. We might not be able to DO much, but by not abandoning them, we show God’s love and serve as Christ’s presence.

And our calling to bring healing may also lead us to speak up for those whose voice is not being heard, and to speak out against the ways they are being harassed or overlooked or harmed by the world around them.

This summons to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and bring healing in his name begins with those closest to us. Who do you need to listen to today? Which friend or family member is hurting or going through a hard time? How might you come alongside, show your interest and care, and speak Christ’s word of hope and promise for them?

Just as the Israelites were claimed as God's holy people as they entered the wilderness, in our Exodus reading today, we too have been named and claimed as God's beloved children in the waters of Holy Baptism. We have been summoned with the disciples of every time and place to "proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth."

And that commission begins with the people God's places in our care every day. May we hear Christ's call and share his gifts joyfully and freely.

Thanks be to God! Amen