**Matthew 9:35-10:8** June 28, 2020

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*Matthew 9:35Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

*10:1He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. 2These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

*5These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ 8Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**How Can We Grow? How Are They Saved?**

You have to admit – even if you have something against Microsoft – that Bill Gates has been the epitome of business success. He started a job in a garage and became certain points, the richest man in the world. When his operating system ran 90% of the computers in the world, you could have made the case

that he had more influence than any other person in the world. Today he is no longer the unchallenged “king of the hill,” but he is still extremely successful, wealthy, and influential by any standard of this world.

In the last decade, a new short list of businessmen are the dictionary definition of success. Regardless of what you think of them, you have to admit that Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk are models of business success. Their stories are told and retold. Little snippets from their lives and business philosophies are highlighted in books and conferences around the world. “Watch them and you will succeed!”

I wonder how many of them will be remembered 2,000 years from now—should the Lord allow this world to last that long. How many of their business stories will be held up as models in business conferences in 4020AD (by the way, that is 1,500 years further into the future than Star Trek projects itself).

How did Jesus do it? How did Jesus go from a ministry mostly confined to Galilee, an area about twice the size of Hardin County, Kentucky—how did he go to an enduring spiritual empire covering the globe, enduring two thousand years? How? Just maybe our reading in Matthew 10 holds some clues. Notice how he teaches, equips, lives the example, then multiplies his efforts through a team of a dozen selected and devoted followers. In this reading he sends them on a trial run. Then, in another year or so in Acts chapter one, he sends them out *“to the ends of the earth”* (8). What a success story! If our question as a Christian congregation is “How can we grow?”, if that is our question, would we not do well to cut and paste the things Jesus is doing here, into our mission and ministry?

If, as I speak this, you have begun to think that there is something that doesn’t quite sound right with the way I am spinning things this morning, God be praised. Looking at Jesus and his work as a business model for the church to emulate is garbage. It is a complete misunderstanding of the Gospel, of the Good News of the incarnate Son of God, come to earth, to save us from our sins.

There is a huge industry—and you who work not in the church know it better than I do—an industry selling paradigms of success to the business world. The business world lives on it, does lunch around it. Increasingly, in the last half century this business model mindset has infiltrated the Christian Church. It has become more than a cottage industry to take what the business world does and do that in the church with our mission. It involves analyzing behaviors, attitudes, marketing, answers to challenges and results. It involves thinking, “If we were to only do this or that, we would do better.” It involves concentrating not on the message but on the methodology. That is a problem. [Repeat.] It is a problem when the church focuses on method rather than message.

Now, at this point, I need to be clear. I am not saying that what Jesus does in Matthew 10 has no bearing on our mission as a congregation. Nor am I saying that the business world has nothing to teach us. But what I am saying is that we need to be clear about the why of the Christian Church.

A question people ask once in a while, in other congregations and ours, is this: “How can we survive?” We see the growing indifference to the teaching and the morals of the Christian faith in the world around us. Here and in most other churches young people are fewer than in the past. Few are the churches which are thriving and growing. So we ask, “How can we survive?”

It is not an invalid question. But is that the right question?

Let’s look at Jesus when he sent out the Twelve. In today’s reading, we not only have Jesus sending out the Twelve apostles, we also have the immediate context. That context tells us what was bumping around in Jesus’ mind when he sent them out. Was he trying to devise a successful business model appealing to the right demographics—or something else?

***“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’”*** (9:35-38).

Why did Jesus select and send the Twelve? It was not an issue of brand survival. It was also not a response to success, like: “Look at the crowds! This brand is really selling locally. Let’s franchise it out with these twelve guys, go regional, and then in a couple years, national and international!” It wasn’t KingdomofGod.com to Jesus. What led Jesus to action? ***“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** Jesus saw people—sinful, fallen, lost human beings destined for hell—and he felt compassion. It is first about message, and only then about method.

To understand what moves our Savior’s and our God’s heart, consider the picture that moved Christ’s heart. ***“They were harassed and helpless.”*** How? One thing: their religious leaders. The vast majority of the Jews’ religious leaders did not look at their Hebrew Bibles (the Old Testament) and then at Jesus, then at their OT and then at Jesus and say, “Wow, this guy is nailing it! Fulfilling every prophecy. He’s gotta be the Messiah!” Instead they argued with Jesus. They spread rumors. They said he was demon possessed. Finally, they paid the going rate for a slave, 30 pieces of silver, to get him executed. That was the religious establishment! No wonder the masses looked harassed and helpless to Jesus. But the people themselves weren’t without blame. As long as Jesus kept the miracles coming, they were entertained and followed. They loved how Jesus challenged the religious authorities. “Yeah, Jesus, let ’em have it!” But when Jesus pulled up short on the miracles, when he started challenging *them*, the crowds, they melted away.

In spite of their selfish short-sightedness, when Jesus looked upon them ***“he had compassion on them.”*** He wanted them to know God’s plan for them. Then he said to his disciples, ***“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field,”*** and then he sent them out. Jesus’ operative motive when he sent out the twelve was not a question about survival of the movement, but concern for people, their eternal well-being.

If Jesus lived in our day, his heart would feel the same thing. The people of our day, even we ourselves, are harassed and helpless. Think of our days of too much information—(not TMI too much information) but we simply are aware of so many more things than in the past. No longer do we get our news in a 30-minute evening news show, but from 24/7/365 outlets. We lose focus of the small circle around us that we *can* influence and impact. With all the information, we instead feel like victims of forces greater than we can ever hope to influence—and you get notifications every 10 minutes just in case you forget! Think of the social media expectations that are pushed upon us, and then when we make a single mistake, it forever brands us. Think about how people feel free to comment and tear down though they never bother to just sit down and talk face-to-face. We are harassed and helpless in an age where forgiveness, mercy and redemption are no longer possible. Where you will be held accountable in the court of public opinion not just for off-hand comments from a lifetime ago, but even for the things people did centuries before you lived, and now in the eyes of some nothing you do will ever make up for that until you are ground into the dust. We Christians are harassed and helpless as the culture we live in becomes ever more godless. We watch immorality become accepted, then celebrated, then enshrined in law, and sense the limits of what is legal creeping ever closer to our convictions as Christians. There are the false teachers and preachers who think that *“godliness is a means to financial gain,”* (1 Timothy 6:5). We have family issues. We have work issues. Finally, who is not painfully aware of our own sins, failings, and weaknesses. How much longer can we take it?

***“When he saw the crowds, [Jesus] had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** Jesus knows the cure. He is the cure. So he selected the Twelve not as an awesome model for growth and success but out of compassion for us. Let that be our motivation, always. We can apply ideas from the world, but the underlying question always needs to be,

**How Can We Grow? How Are They Saved?**

That was why Jesus sent Twelve out into the world.

Isn’t that absolutely, totally wonderful to know that unlike all the ads shoved at you, all the things people sell you, in Jesus you find the one person who has nothing to gain from you, but everything to give you? Isn’t it great to know that the one person who knows you best of all, better than you sometimes wish he knew you, that he still bleeds with compassion for you because he knows how harassed and helpless you are?

Here at the end of this sermon then, we must briefly consider one more thing. At the risk of sounding self-serving, I must speak the truth of this Scripture today. If in fact Jesus sent out the Twelve, not just for the Kingdom, but especially out of compassion for humanity, should we not consider the importance of the Holy Ministry for humanity? Christ’s desire is that there are full-time workers who are committed to a life of preaching and teaching the truth of Christ to the world.

Christians must consider the importance of the Holy Ministry, in Christian teachers and pastors. They ought not strut about as holier-than-thou or more-learned-than-thou or closer-to-God-than-thou, but as Christ’s servants, dedicated to bringing God and people together, and keeping them together, that all may know the compassion of Christ; that those who know it may be reminded.

The first thing Jesus reminds us to do regarding the need for pastors is, ***“Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.”*** Pray!

Second, we need to encourage young people to consider full-time service to the Lord, as messengers of God’s love, to save people for eternity. In my father’s day, our seminary was graduating 50-60 pastors a year. In my day more like 35. Now, 25, 27, 28. Encourage!

Finally, support. The biggest expense of your congregation is your pastor. I say that not in pride but in self-conscious embarrassment, yet to your credit before God. You are committed to a full-time minister in your midst, in this community. You likewise have committed to a scholarship for a Christian teaching candidate from this congregation. Support!

Remember, it’s not a question of how we survive or how we grow. It’s a question of how people are saved. Amen.