

Sermon 1606

Matthew 9.35-10.8

July 2, 2017

Isn't this a great weekend? The 4th of July is close enough that there's going to be fireworks for the next two days as a lead-up to the granddaddy of them all—Tuesday night's show a smidgen past when it gets dark.

Who would have thought this would be the result of the huddled masses, yearning to breathe free as they set out from Amsterdam and Southampton, Hamburg and Naples, Belfast and Edinburgh? A fertile land, rich with opportunity, awaited them. They came, each with their skills, to make this land, your land, their land, our land.

I see some of that in our text for today. Jesus looks over a fertile harvest field and then he looks at his disciples, each of them gifted with his authority and promise. Big things resulted from their work, even bigger than the founding and growth of our country. Let's see what we can learn when we look at that day they were

Sent Out into the Lord's Harvest

1. For a bumper crop.
2. With top-notch training.

“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).’”

Early in Jesus' ministry everybody could tell this wasn't going to work. There were just too many people coming to Jesus. There were just too many towns and villages to visit. Jesus' public ministry would last just over three years, a little over a thousand days. If there were a thousand towns, villages and hamlets in Galilee and Judea, and there probably were, Jesus could spend one day in each of them, not counting travel time. What impact could such a fleeting presence make, even in the best of times? And these were not the best of times. The people were harassed by diseases and sicknesses. Their medicine was rest and keep drinking water. Some got better, some died, a lot just stayed sick. They came to Jesus and he healed them. Jesus had more on his plate than he could chew through. He wanted his disciples to see that. He wanted his disciples to want to be part of the solution. “Pray for workers in the Lord's harvest field.”

Isn't the world a mess out there? The violence? The oppression? Famines and wars, natural disasters? There's a reason for that, and it's not just to keep the news reporters hopping, though they are some of the busiest people you can find, nowadays. The reason is sin and a Christian recognizes that. In heaven none of these things will be happening. So where there is sin, there is a story, if you will, an opportunity to spread the Gospel.

We know that almost instinctively when it comes to our children. You have a baby boy. You have a baby girl. What to do? Get the child baptized. You want them to share that Christian faith that you have. You want to see them in heaven for all eternity with you. And when they are older? Sunday School, Catechism class, Teen Bible class. You don't want them to walk away from Jesus now. Unfortunately, sometimes it seems like we care more about them than we do about ourselves. We've got Bible classes for adults, too. God wants us to grow in our faith as much as he wants to see our children grow in their faith.

Now let's lift our eyes. Look at all the people around us. They are suffering just like us in a wicked world. And, like us, they are unwittingly or not, contributing to the irritations of life by our sinfully selfish attitudes. They need the Gospel. They need the message of God's forgiveness which can transform lives. You know it transforms lives, because look what the Holy Spirit has done and is continuing to do to you.

When our country is at its best we display that concern for others. We have made former enemies stable and lasting allies and friends. We have helped developing countries dream and reach out for a free and civil society, helping them set up organs of government and justice in line with democratic principles, even when they express their independence in ways we don't appreciate!

If a country governed only by natural law and a set of just and reasonable statutes and constitutions displays such concern and optimistically surveys a world ripe for its ideas, how can God's people do less? Pray. Pray that we have workers, pastors to fill our pulpits and pastors to start missions, both at home and abroad. Pray that our ministry grow here at Green Valley, that more and more people enter our church and join us in faith. "Lift up your eyes," Jesus tells us. "The harvest is plentiful."

We are sent out into the Lord's harvest with top-notch training.

Jesus then appoints twelve of his followers to be his apostles, the ones he will send out. He gives them top-notch training. He "gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness (10.1)." He gives them detailed instructions. "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give (10.5-8)."

What power, to be given authority from God himself! To heal! To raise the dead! To drive out demons! But that wasn't their big job. Their big job was to preach the Gospel, to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Yes, the kingdom of heaven was right on in front of them, in their faces. The apostles would turn hearts towards Jesus so they would receive him, even if he never got to their town in person. The miracles, the miracles were only their credentials, for the Jews of Jesus' day expected men sent directly from God, prophets, to prove their sending

with miracles. Today we expect a diploma on the wall or a call certificate, like I and Pastor Kolander, Mrs. Revis and all our public teaching ministers at Green Valley Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten have.

But they had more than Jesus' authority. They had training in righteousness from him. They listened to Jesus. They reflected upon his teachings and sayings.

That's what I want to impress on each of us today. Training. We are used to all sorts of training. Orientation, continuing education, training seminars. What is the specialized training we receive in the church?

Don't be disappointed. Don't let the humbleness fool you. This is the training we give and the training we get. Hearing the Word of God. Receiving the Lord's Supper. Bible study. Worship. That's it! These are the means by which the Holy Spirit powerfully works on our hearts. He enlightens us, allowing us to believe and understand that God, for the sake of his Son has counted Jesus' perfect life as our life, crediting his righteousness to our account. He makes us see what all the money on earth could not buy, the holy, precious blood of Jesus, his innocent suffering and death purchased us, buying us back from our sins and the hell we deserved.

But it doesn't stop there. The Holy Spirit lifts our eyes to see the harvest field around us so that we enter that harvest field. We go with the same Gospel message the twelve apostles were sent out with. At its best, we are so confident and at home with our training that we don't even give it a second thought. We just plow into that harvest field. Just this week I had a member, two members, actually, no, three! talk to me about neighbors or relatives they had been praying for and "working" on. Maybe two more baptisms and an adult confirmation are down the road! God knows. We will doggedly follow in the footsteps of the Holy Spirit. The message that these three members heard here equipped them and it was top-notch training. They went out with a message of full and free forgiveness of sins. "I'm sure Pastor Pieper or Pastor Kolander will baptize your baby. No, you don't have to be a member. Just give them a call." "Here, I know you want to know more about what my church teaches, so my pastor said maybe you'd enjoy this booklet. We use it for those who want to know more about Jesus." There's no better message than God's "yes" to us in Jesus Christ. The courage of your faith has received the training to love your fellow human beings. That's why you want to share the message with them. That's why you want to invite them to church. That's why you want to pray for them.

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There's a sense of excitement in our country, just two days shy of the 4th of July. We're all looking forward to it. I hope there's a sense of excitement in our hearts also because of the great things our Lord has in store for the harvest field we know

as our beloved town, among our neighbors and friends. I hope there's a sense of excitement in all of our hearts over the ways in which the Lord will use each of us to reach more souls for Jesus.