

Sermon Title: *"Lost Cause?"*

June 14th, 2020 – 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 9:35-10:8, 9-20



Theme:

What's in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus' modern-day Disciples and Apostles, we are sent out into our world to share the Gospel with the people around us, but why are we having such a hard time doing it? Many congregations spend a great deal of their budgets on Evangelizing, the fancy word for sharing the "good news" with others. I think our text today gives us some guidance on how we can be more successful in our evangelistic efforts.

In our text today, Jesus starts out preaching in the synagogues, sharing the Gospel with those who would hear, and healing every disease. In Jesus' day, Cholera, Leprosy, Pneumonia, and even Bubonic Plague were all fairly common diseases, many of these resulting in death for anyone who contracted one of them. These were far more deadly and dangerous than Covid-19. Jesus providing healing would have attracted a lot of attention. He then has compassion on the crowd because they were "harassed and helpless." Jesus then prays with his Disciples and gives them His famous, "The Harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few speech."

After this, Jesus sends His Disciples to seek out Israelites first for their first Evangelizing experience. These were the people they were most familiar with and knew their customs. Lesson #1. Stick to people you know before seeking out people you don't. Jesus commanded the Disciples to heal and cleanse people, and to cast out demons. Instead of carrying cash, Jesus commands His Disciples to rely on the existing custom of hospitality. He commands them to greet welcoming households and bless them, but if a town fails to show hospitality, shake the dust off of your feet. Failing to show hospitality to a traveler, especially a Jewish brother, would

have been socially unacceptable in Jesus' day and would have garnered more consternation than a shopper without a facemask at Costco.

As Jesus sends His Disciples out, he warns them about the danger they face. The symbolism here really foreshadows what would later happen to the disciples. The wolf was a symbol for Rome and all the Disciples, except for Judas Iscariot, would suffer brutal torture at the hands of the Romans, and only John would die a natural death. There is a cost to Discipleship, then and now, but Jesus warns the Disciples to be as "wise as serpents," a reference back to the serpent who deceived Eve in the Garden, and innocent as doves. Doves are of course a symbol of peace.

Jesus warns that betrayal will come as they share the Gospel. Even some of the people the Disciples would share the Gospel with would flog them and drag them before government officials. This serves a greater purpose and provides them with a new audience for the Gospel. Jesus promises the Disciples that the Holy Spirit would give them the words to say in those situations so they need not worry about what to say.

So what does this have to do with us? How does this help us in our Discipleship process? Well first, as I mentioned earlier. We need to start with people we know. Bulk mailings have very little return on investment because there is no relationship. Secondly, spiritual healing usually goes hand and hand with physical healing. Illnesses and Injuries often help people get over themselves because they can't do the things they want to do, so they naturally look for outside help.

Thirdly, and this is a big one, look for people who are harassed and helpless, just as Jesus did at the beginning of our text. Quite often, our evangelism efforts are targeted to people who have the financial means to give back to the Church. Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't share the Gospel with these folks, but if this appears to be the main thrust of our Evangelistic efforts, it not only appears that we have an ulterior motive, but we are often met with suspicion. Focusing most of our efforts on the people who can't put a dime in the offering plate, shows a different, and a more dove-like motive. So, look for those people around you who are helpless and harassed. Given the recent news, there appears to be a large undercurrent of people who feel that they are harassed. Whether they actually are or not, doesn't matter so much. If they feel they are, the Gospel can go to work on them. Now I'm not talking about the folks up in Seattle terrorizing people. I'm talking about your neighbor who for some reason feels slighted by someone or something. Show you care about them and let them

know that Jesus does too. It just might be the intervention he or she needs to keep him or her being part of that craziness up north.

Just as Jesus warned the Disciples about the persecution they would face, we too will face persecution. Expect it. Prepare for it. Deal with it. God may be using it to give the Gospel a greater audience, just as He did in ancient times. While we are unlikely to be flogged and beaten for our faith in North America, it does go on in other parts of the world. Persecution here is usually more subtle. I know there are many people who saw the recent restrictions on worship to be a religious liberty issue and feel that the government, in its desire to control the spread of coronavirus, overstepped its bounds. Whether the government acted with malice or was simply hyper focused on minimizing death and curbing the spread, we did get a small taste of what Christians face in other parts of the world. God prevailed. Through online worship, more people heard the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, even in our de-churched corner of North America. We were also able to reconnect with our shut-ins in a way they haven't been able to connect with for a long time. Their faith was strengthened.

I know there are a few large and wealthy churches out there that have a lot of cool stuff to attract people. A fancy building, trinkets, and fancy musical productions only go so far. When the glitter and the glitz wears off, they are out the door, often as quickly as they walked in it, unless they get plugged in with a group of people who truly care about them. People need to be with people who care about them. This can be done without the huge, fancy church or big budget. It's done by looking around and getting to know people in the community. Engage that Fast Food worker, grocery worker, health care provider, and especially the janitor. How many times do we ignore the janitor, even though he or she is just a few feet away? How hard is it to greet him or her by name and get to know them a little better? How hard is it to thank them for their efforts? Next time we have a potluck, invite them. Hopefully we will be able to do that in a few weeks. In fact, that may be a great idea once we are fully open. Have an outdoor BBQ or Potluck and invite someone from the community.

We have a lot of great sinner-saints here. Scripture shows how the Holy Spirit gave the Disciples the words to say when sharing the Gospel. We've seen how the Spirit did the same with Martin Luther with his famous, "Here I Stand" speech, or Martin Luther King, Jr. with his "I have a Dream" speech, but you don't have to have Martin Luther in your name to receive help

from the Holy Spirit. He comes to you too, and He'll give you the words to say too. Relax. God's got all of this. We just need to listen and follow His lead.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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