

Sunday Between 12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June [11]

Matthew 9:35-10:23

There's only so much you can learn sitting in a classroom. At some point, you're going to have to get some real life experience! If you want to be a teacher, you need to practice working with real children! If you want to be a mechanic, you need to practice working on real cars. If you want to be a nurse, you need experience working with real sick people! Your education is not complete until you get out there and use what you've learned!

The same thing is true with the Christian life. In today's gospel reading, Jesus is teaching his disciples how to do the work of the ministry. He's saying, "Alright. You've watched me preach. You've seen me do healings. You've observed me driving out demons. You've watched me love people that have never been loved before. You've seen me do the things that a servant of God would normally do. Now it's time for YOU to do it! I didn't call you to follow me so that you could stand around and watch me do all the work! It's time for YOU to get some experience!"

And in our reading, Jesus gives them their tools for ministry. First, he gives them a model for ministry. Jesus sends them ahead of him from village to village. Notice that Jesus doesn't wait around for the villagers to come to Him. He left Nazareth and went to them, and now he is sending others ahead to prepare the people for him. There's a lesson here. In Christian circles, we talk a lot about getting people to come to our church. But we don't talk enough about getting our church to go to the people. That's what Jesus is talking about here. He doesn't say, "Wait in the sanctuary, and pray for people to come in and fill the pews." He's saying, "I want the people in the pews to go to them"

The second thing that Jesus gives us is companionship for ministry. The disciples were sent in pairs and it was customary in both Jewish and Greek culture to send messengers in groups of two. That way, if something were to go wrong, there would be two witnesses to testify on behalf of the sender. But the bottom line is that God never intended you and I to do the work of the ministry by ourselves. We need help, we need encouragement.

Jesus gives his disciples the provisions for ministry. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey - no bread, no bag, no money in your belts." He even said travel barefoot. This is the ultimate in 'Travelling light!' but there was a reason for this. To teach the disciples that if they're ever in a situation like this, they will always be able to count on God to take care of them. Remember, this is just a short term mission project. These disciples are just getting their feet wet. And Jesus wants them to know early on that God's call will never lack God's supply. In fact, two years later, Jesus has the disciples look back on this experience. In Luke 22:35: Jesus said, "When I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" And the disciples said, "Nothing." In other words, "there was never a time when we didn't have what we needed. God always took care of us." God put that in the Bible for us. He wants us to know that when we step out on faith to serve Him, we will always have everything we need to live our lives.

Then, Jesus said, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town." In other words, don't go running around looking for the nicest possible accommodation. Stay wherever you are welcomed. Jesus is telling his disciples here,

Don't leave these people with the impression that your ministry is all about you rather than all about God. Don't lead them to believe that you're in this only for yourself.

There's nothing wrong with experiencing the finer things in life. But when this becomes the main reason why you live your life and why you serve the Lord, then there's a problem. And then, Jesus says "if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." It was the custom of any Jewish person who had travelled outside of Palestine to carefully shake off all of the dust of the Gentile territories where they had passed through. By this action, they disassociated themselves from the sin of those countries and their impending judgment.

We all know people that we would love to see come to Christ. But for whatever reason, they are not open to spiritual things. Maybe they're just not ready. Keep them in your prayers. But if they get hostile, shake the dust off. Say, "Lord, I have fulfilled my responsibility to do what you wanted me to do. Now I hand this person over to you and ask that you take it from here."

So the message is that God calls us to minister to people, all sorts of people, new people we haven't met yet, people who are eager to engage with us and those who are not. God is concerned about their and our eternal destiny. He's also concerned about the immediate situation. He's concerned about the problems we have right now, and just as Jesus sent his disciples to help the hurting people of Galilee, He is sending us to help the hurting people of our community.

So the old image of the parish priest doing all the work will simply not stand the test of scripture. The diocesan mission statement which encourages us all to serve Christ as equals by virtue of our baptism is far more like it. The job of the parish priest is just one part of the body of Christ. The point is that God never intended for us to be spectator Christians. We all need to be involved in some kind of ministry, whether it's Bible study, or visiting the sick, or encouraging other believers. Each one of us needs hands on practical experience. Otherwise, your Christian education isn't complete.

And as we have been reminded, God is faithful, our needs are met when we trust in him to provide for us and there are tangible results, even when we don't see them ourselves, when we follow God's call to do his work.