

Matthew 9:35-10:8
Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 18, 2023

“On your marks...Get set...Go!” Don’t those words send a charge through your body? It happens whether you are running or watching a race. Even for those of us who are slow, like the athlete whose coach told him, “We have to time you with a calendar, not a stopwatch,” respond with hopeful excitement. Maybe the faster runners will slip or stumble along the way and I can win. All tend to get excited at a race.

I pray a similar charge and enthusiastic response comes when we hear the words of Jesus in this text saying

GO WITH THE GOSPEL

I. With compassion like Jesus

II. With power like Jesus

As we go with the gospel we do so with compassion like Jesus showed in his ministry. He went forth everywhere—to towns and villages, big and small. He taught in the synagogues, the places people gathered for education and worship. He preached outdoors on hillsides, along the Sea of Galilee and in houses—wherever he met people. He addressed small groups and large ones, even single individuals. He took time for everyone.

His message was “the good news of the kingdom,” as Matthew summed it up. His kingdom is his rule in hearts. He proclaimed the gospel to establish it. He told of his work as the Savior to set us free from sin and its power, free for following Jesus. Through that message he set up his rule in the hearts of his hearers. He brought the needed rest for souls through the forgiveness of sins.

He also performed healings. These miracles backed up his words and showed he was what he claimed to be, the very Son of God. They also showed his concern for the unfortunate. Nothing withstood his power, neither physical illness nor demon possession. He showed that he was almighty. He brought comfort to the suffering as he used his power to help them.

We see his motivation for ministry as we take a closer look at Matthew’s account. “When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” His compassion was noted. It prompted the healings. It took in more than their physical distress. Spiritual conditions were what he was especially interested in. Compassion is described as a pained feeling at the sight of suffering and a strong desire to relieve or remove it.

It is a vivid term, saying the internal organs are all worked up, such as the heart, liver, lungs, even intestines. That is an apt word because when something really moves you, don't you get all churned up inside? That was the way Jesus felt.

What prompted such feelings? He saw the crowd as a flock that was harassed. Literally it means they were flayed or skinned. Their fleeces and skin were torn as they wandered through brambles and rocks, especially when not following the shepherd. They were helpless, like dead bodies scattered and thrown around. Their spiritual leaders did not bring them to God or to wholesome spiritual food. They burdened them with commands but offered no strength to obey or the comfort of the gospel for their failures. They were not enjoying the safety of the flock of the Lord.

As a result the potential harvest was going to waste. We hear reports like that at times. Weather conditions prevent a crop from being brought in, causing it to rot in the field. Or what was intended to be a staggered harvest that would last for a lengthy stretch turns out to have every field ready at the same time and not all can be brought in before it has gone beyond maturity. The peas or sweet corn need to be plowed under. It is a sad waste. More serious is when souls and eternity are involved. Just as a crop does not bring itself in so the harvest of the Lord takes workers. We know from Pentecost that the Holy Spirit does that work as he operates through the means of grace, but someone needs to get the Word out. That is why he instructed, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send workers into his harvest field." That work to be done consumed the thoughts and energy of our Savior. He seeks the same urgency in his followers to pray and to place themselves available to be part of the answer to their urgent petitions. It would not make sense to get all worked up about the need and then to say "Somebody else take care of it." God does carry out his will. The harvest will be gathered. It is a privilege that he allows us to be part of bringing it in. Seize the privilege with joy.

As we go with the gospel we share the Savior's concern and compassion. It is instilled by the Lord Jesus. We recognize the need. No one is saved apart from Jesus. All of us have sinned and are lost by nature. We were born alienated from God. It shows in our selfishness. Who comes first naturally? Our dishonesty and impurity give additional evidence. People live at odds with each other, taking advantage of one another, hurting others, not having God as number one in their lives. They are helpless, scattered about without a proper spiritual diet, only the chaff of false teaching and denials of the Word. We know the solution: Jesus paid for all of our sins. Every one is forgiven. God loves you. He has done it all. He wants you in his heaven. Trust your Savior. When you know and realize that he is the only way of salvation it compels you to reach out with God's love. Share Christ's concern for souls.

Then why don't we do it more? Obstacles are many. Sometimes we don't love others. We feel some are more worthy and look down on those who are not like us. Urgency is removed when you succumb to the idea that all ways of religions are OK. If so, what is important about spreading the Word? We may be afraid of the reaction others will have. Or maybe we get lazy. We need to humble ourselves and pray, "Forgive us, Lord, and as you touch our hearts with your forgiving love, fill us with compassion." Thus renewed go to that unchurched friend. Seek the one who has been neglecting God's Word, expressing concern for their soul. Go with compassion like Jesus.

II.

Motivated by God's grace and love, go with the gospel with power from Jesus. He sent his disciples with that power. The text listed the names of twelve men, calling them apostles. That term means he sent or commissioned them. We have little background on many of them, but they seem to be ordinary, not sophisticated or highly educated. A few were fishermen, another was a tax collector (Matthew shared Jesus' call to himself last week in the Gospel reading) and there was a political activist. They became God's workers, called, equipped and sent by him.

He sent them with power. He "gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness." They would share the miraculous powers he had used. That ability showed their connection with Jesus and gave validity to their work. They were assured he would continue to help them on their mission. It also gave them reassurance as they faced challenges and obstacles. They could rely on his presence and power.

The instructions also took in the area of their labors. "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." They had to start somewhere. Jesus is not restricted in his love. He shared the Word with Gentiles that he came into contact with, but they were not the main focus at the time. Until he had fulfilled his work of redemption, the time was not ripe to take the gospel further into the world. That would change, however.

Something that would not change was the message. "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'" It was the same news John the Baptist had proclaimed and that we heard from Jesus himself. They were to announce that God was carrying out his promise to redeem the world from sin. Jesus was the promised Savior who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and types. Proclaiming the Savior included a call to repentance. Their hearers needed to admit their guilt and look to the Savior for mercy. Faith in Jesus Christ would make them part of his kingdom.

Jesus also told them something special about the manner of their work. “Freely you have received, freely give.” The Lord’s dealings with us are all by grace. We have not earned or deserved them. That is true not only of forgiveness and salvation but also of serving. The ministry is a privilege, not a right or reward. The powers he gave to the apostles were also given freely. Likewise, they should freely give. They were not to charge for the miracles they would perform nor seek personal gain. Dispense the gospel freely and gladly. That message carries the power to convert sinners to faith. God will do his work. There is no need to coerce people or try to argue them into believing.

That same power is with you and me as we share the gospel. It wins souls. What about the miraculous powers the apostles received? We might enjoy having them at times. They are secondary back ups to the message. The completed work of Christ and the written Word do the same for us. As we teach what Christ and the apostles did, their miracles authenticate our message. The genuineness of the messengers is based on what they teach in comparison with God’s Word.

There has been another change and that is in the field of work. Today (and soon after this for the apostles) Christ’s followers are sent into all the world. We have an unlimited mission field. It is an awesome task. That’s why it is good to know that his power goes with us, enabling us to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges. He blesses us through that power. Exciting things are happening. You can read about our home and world missions in the Forward in Christ magazine and view them in our monthly showing of the WELS Connection. We realize the worldwide scope of the work is not something any of us can cover personally. That is why we work together as a congregation and as a synod. We support others who work in our name. Continue your prayers for and in behalf of the workers. We did so while waiting for our pastoral vacancy to be filled. Now that our prayers have been answered, don’t stop. Many congregations remain with vacancies, some of them close by. Fields are waiting as billions inhabit this earth, many not having the truth taught to them. Be generous in your offerings for the work to go on in our midst and throughout the world. As we work individually and together, Christ’s power is with us.

Much work remains. The Savior’s concern remains. What about us? Knowing the gospel and the Savior’s love, can we do differently? Go with the gospel. Take it beyond the walls of this building today and all week through. On your marks, get set, go!