

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 9:35–10:8 (9–20)

Sermon: “Sent Out”

I don't know if you've ever experienced the panic of being lost. Most people have had the experience of waking up in the middle of the night, confused by a bad dream or uncertain of their surroundings, experiencing a moment of fear and uncertainty. Others have a more dramatic experience of being lost. The relief of being found is enormous.

Today's text begins with Jesus looking over the crowds and feeling sorry for them because they were distressed and scattered like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

In his compassion, Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven to them. But God's compassion did not end with the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Beginning with the Twelve, he sent the Church into the whole world to gather each of us into his flock.

The Gospel for the Second Sunday after Pentecost begins with Jesus observing that ***“the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”*** (at hew9:37). The connection between Pentecost and the theme of harvest goes back to the Old Testament. Pentecost is known in the Old Testament as the Festival of Weeks. It was the first of the two harvest festivals in the Israelite calendar, marking the ingathering of the first-fruits of the land, especially the early wheat.

This harvest foreshadows another harvest that would begin at this time of the year, when on Pentecost God poured the Holy Spirit upon the Church to empower it to take the message of the good news of the coming of the kingdom of heaven to the ends of the earth.

That still lay in the future when Jesus sent the Twelve to lost sheep of the house of Israel. What connects the mission of the Twelve with the mission of the Church is their connection to the mission of Jesus. Jesus gave to twelve the authority to take his message to the cities and villages of Israel. Jesus gave to the Church the same authority to proclaim the coming of the kingdom and to forgive sins in his name far beyond the borders of Israel, to this place and to the ends of the earth.

The time had come in Jesus' ministry for the word about what God was doing through him to be spread more broadly throughout Israel. To accomplish this, Jesus called twelve of his followers and prepared them to go to cities and villages throughout the land and proclaim to ***"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*** the coming of the kingdom of heaven (10:6–7).

But Jesus did not simply select twelve men and send them out. Jesus' lengthy speech in Matthew 10, of which our text is just the short first portion, is intended to prepare the disciples for their task.

Jesus' preparation of the disciples includes a sober warning about what being his disciples will mean for them. Discipleship isn't at all what the crowds following Jesus were expecting, as he had already begun to show.

In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus told his disciples that ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”***

Being a disciple of Jesus is not about prophesying or even performing miracles in his name. Rather, the true disciple is the one who is known by Jesus and who does the will of his Father.

In Matthew 8:18–21, Jesus pointed out to two of those who offered to follow him that being a disciple of Jesus was no easy and comfortable calling. It requires putting him ahead of home and even family, perhaps having **“nowhere to lay his head.”**

In Matthew 9:9–13, Jesus responded to the Pharisees who objected to his association with **“tax collectors and sinners”** by telling them that following Jesus was not an exercise in conventional piety. It is a radical reorientation to the mission of Jesus himself, **“For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”** Jesus was coming to die on the cross to save just such sinners as these.

Now as Jesus prepares to send his laborers into the harvest, he prepares them for what they will encounter: poverty, rejection, persecution, even losing of their own lives, just as Jesus himself would be persecuted and die (10:16–23).

They would be dragged before governors and kings. Delivered over to death by their own brothers and fathers and children. Hated by all for Jesus' sake.

But Jesus' disciples will face these sobering prospects because he sends them with his own authority (10:1). Nothing about these men themselves would equip them for such bravery or dedication. They did not represent the cream of Jewish society. Among them were these (10:2–4): One who, as a tax collector for the Roman government, was a social outcast. Another a rather excitable fisherman and his brother and two business partners. A couple of working-class guys from Galilee. Another who repeatedly expresses doubts and uncertainties about what Jesus says and does. A political extremist and a traitor.

What really matters is not who these twelve were, or their lack of obvious qualifications for the job. What matters is that Jesus gave them his own **“authority”** to carry out the tasks that he has assigned to them.

In Matthew 7:29, authority is what characterized Jesus' teaching.

In Matthew 9:6, Jesus shows the people that he has received the authority to forgive sins.

In Matthew 28:18, the fact that Jesus had been given **“all authority in heaven and on earth”** is the basis on which he sends his followers to the ends of the earth to make disciples in his name.

The central task Jesus gave his disciples authority to perform is the proclamation that the **“kingdom of heaven is at hand”** (10:5–8).

As we hear about the task assigned to the Twelve, we are inclined to focus on the healings or the casting out of demons. For Jesus, the healings and exorcisms were simply signs that bore witness to the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Healing diseases and emasculating Satan's henchmen were signs of Jesus' final defeat of the devil and all the effects of sin. That would happen when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave. That is the coming of the kingdom!

The mission of the Twelve was an extension of the mission of Jesus to take that proclamation to the ***"lost sheep of the house of Israel."*** That is why they should expect to be received as Jesus himself was received—with rejection and crosses of their own.

But the mission would not be halted; this preaching mission of the Twelve was just the beginning of the task.

Jesus declared that in the end times, ***“This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations”*** (24:14).

And so, the kingdom of heaven that the disciples were sent out to proclaim has also come in these last days to us, not the lost sheep of Israel but, as Jesus would say in another context in the Gospel of John, to ***“other sheep that are not of this fold”*** (John 10:16).

Through the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven through God’s Word and Sacraments, the forgiveness of sins is yours in Jesus. This is where it was all headed: Jesus’ sending the Twelve to preach the Kingdom began a harvest that has brought us, too, into the flock, no longer lost sheep without a shepherd. We are no longer lost sheep, without a shepherd. We have been brought into the kingdom. Amen