

Being Sent Out

Today's assigned Gospel reading has an option for reading further in chapter 10 to verse 23. However, there are many preachable topics even in just the shorter text that I had decided not to use the entire reading. With the longer text, there are even more topics which could be discussed, but in the timing of a sermon, all of these topics cannot be discussed adequately. I would suggest that you go ahead and read these other verses, primarily because these verses are a bridge between today's shorter text and next week's Gospel reading.

Today's text could be seen as a kind of transition for the disciples. Up until now, they had been students of Jesus - listening to His teaching, witnessing His miracles and watching His interaction with all kinds of people whom Jesus encountered. This transition is one from being a student to being sent out to do the work that Jesus has called them to do. In today's text, Jesus is commissioning the disciples to being 'apostles' - ones who are sent out. This initial sending out can be seen as a kind of internship for them, much like high school students or college students who take an internship to learn how to apply what they learned to the career in which they will be working.

Jesus' commissioning speech starts out positively. These twelve men will be given the powers that Jesus has to cure illnesses and drive out demons. Their job seems easy enough - tell people that the kingdom of heaven is near. I would imagine that many of the disciples were eager to start this new call when they heard Jesus say this. Now, they would have power, the kind of heavenly power that transcends earthly power, even the power of the Roman occupiers.

Now imagine how fast this eagerness and willingness to go waned when Jesus started telling them the negatives that they will encounter. Their mission sounded

simple enough at first - go to people with whom you are familiar and proclaim the good news. If they don't receive it, then you should forget about them. Don't spend your time with people who aren't open to hearing the message. Jesus' words then turn harsher when He talks of trials, persecutions and all kinds of hardships to come to the apostles because of this message. The reason that Jesus warns the apostles of the hardships they will face is that Jesus' message is so radical, so different from the ways of the world.

We get a hint of this different, radical message in what might seem to be some segue verses at the beginning of today's text. However, these verses are actually more than providing a transition between the verses before (which were from last week's reading) and the commissioning of the twelve. At first reading these verses do not necessarily provide a smooth segue. However, upon 'further review' as they say, they give a hint to how Jesus approached any interaction with others, especially those who were in need of something. Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion for the crowds. Whenever we see Jesus responding to others, when Jesus is moved to action, we often hear that Jesus had compassion for them. It is this compassion that makes Jesus different from others. It is this compassion that leads Jesus to see others as children of God who had been taken advantage of by others who were looking to get whatever they could from them.

These verses remind the disciples, now made apostles, that they are not just to do those things that Jesus did - heal the sick, drive out demons and announce the coming of the kingdom, but also have the same mindset, the same attitude towards others. That is, we are to see others with compassion. By seeing others with compassion, we see the world not for ourselves, but what others need from the world.

This difference is most apparent in how Jesus treats others. The people who had nothing to offer the world were harassed by the world and helpless in their struggle against the world. The world wanted to take everything they could from them and then forget about them, discarding them to a waste pile. But Jesus had compassion for them and He did something for them. Jesus did for them what the world refused to do. That is what Jesus also wants us to do.

How can our compassion look like today and to whom should we give it? In other words who is helpless against the world and who is harassed by the world? Are there others besides the poor, the homeless, the jobless, those on the margins of society who are in need of our compassion? If so, how do we show them compassion? If we look at who Jesus showed compassion towards, we would find that apart from the different physical needs they had, they all had a spiritual need. For whatever reason, the people had a disconnect with God as well as with other people. Whether it was society that made this disconnect or through choices of their own; this disconnect, this brokenness existed. Jesus could see that these people who were disconnected were just wandering aimlessly about, just trying to get through life and not sure how to do it or where it would take them; kind of like sheep without a shepherd. While these people may seem like they are well integrated into society, that they contribute to society, they really are lost, they really need guidance. We may know some of these kinds of people through work or our hobbies or through our children's activities. At times, the lost may even sit in these same pews. They may seem like us, but they usually will have an emptiness within them. Maybe they cannot define it themselves or are not even fully aware of it, but it is there. That is to whom we show compassion, sharing with them the Good News of Jesus. We don't have to be preachy about it; we don't have to shake a Bible in their face telling them they have to change or they'll be forever

condemned; and we don't need to be smug and say that we knew they were lost all along. Maybe we just need to sit and listen to them; maybe we just need to invite them to church so they can see for themselves. Maybe it is by our actions of how we treat others. However we show compassion, we are to be pointing to Jesus.

But there is a danger in doing this - we may not be heard; the person may reject what we have to say, telling us to, "Go, and fly a kite." It may be heard as if all we ever talk about is religion and the person who we thought was our friend may end that friendship. That is the risk that Jesus wants us to take. It is like taking a risk when sowing seed. Some may not fall on fertile ground and not germinate right away. But the seed is planted and someday, it may germinate within the person and start to grow when it's least expected. Even if we do not see it happen or if we do not get acknowledged for bringing the person to Christ, we still need to take that risk. Not for Jesus' sake but for the sake of the one whom we try to reach, the one who is lost.

Jesus wants us to take that next step from being someone who just learns about Jesus to being one who goes out and shows the benefits of following Jesus. He warns us that the world will do whatever it can to discourage us from being an apostle, one who is sent. But by showing compassion to those who are harassed by the world, who are made to feel insignificant in the world and by the world, we can reach those people who are lost. By showing them compassion, we are letting them know that there is a Way that does not forget about them; there is a Way that does not look to use them; that there is a Way that sees them as a child of God, a child who is valued and whose life is meaningful.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/2wLHODj17Tk>

Service: <https://youtu.be/xHbz-kPhIwM>