



## **“Hey, We Sure Could Use Some Help Over Here!”**

Pastor Andy CastroLang

June 18, 2017

### **Scripture (MSG):**

#### ***Matthew 9:35-10:8***

<sup>35-38</sup> Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. “What a huge harvest!” he said to his disciples. “How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!”

#### The Twelve Harvest Hands

**10** <sup>1-4</sup> The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. This is the list of the twelve he sent: Simon (they called him Peter, or “Rock”); Andrew, his brother; James, Zebedee’s son; John, his brother; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew, the tax man; James, son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon, the Zealot; Judas Iscariot (who later turned on him).

<sup>5-8</sup> Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge:

“Don’t begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don’t try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.

(<sup>10</sup> “Don’t think you have to put on a fund-raising campaign before you start. You don’t need a lot of equipment. *You* are the equipment, and all you need to keep that going is three meals a day. Travel light.)

## **Sermon:**

First, you get a brief recap of what Jesus has been doing in the chapters before this reading: he has been teaching of God's kingdom, sharing the good news of God's love for even the lowliest, the poor and the forgotten. He has been healing them, and feeding them, and raising the dead to life.

His "heart broke" for these poor people he sees in every town and every synagogue. He has, in more traditional phrasing, "compassion" for them. But compassion is not merely pity, nor is it charity...it is sharing in the experience of someone else with them. So he is feeling their suffering, their anguish, their sorrow.

And his heart breaks for them. For Jesus knows that God does not want God's children suffering, anguished and sorrowing.

There is so much to do to restore health, end the suffering, share joy and love!

As with all things that Jesus does in the gospels, he ponders in prayer. He pours out his heart to God...and then receives the assuring message of response: share the labor, grow the numbers of people to help one another. And he does. Jesus has plenty more followers than the 12 that are listed in this text, but these 12 are ready, he seems to think. And of course, that number 12 is "the number"...reminding everyone of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Jesus will renew the Jewish people. That is the gospel writer's subtext here. He is the Jewish Messiah, and he heals, cures, and teaches in the name and the power of the Jewish God, YHWH. He sends out 12 apostles (which literally means, 'those sent out') for the people of the 12 tribes of Israel.

You and I know that this sending goes beyond the Jewish people. Or we would all be sitting here calling ourselves the Jewish followers of Jesus. At the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus will tell his followers to make disciples of ALL nations, all peoples. But not just yet.

Right now, it is a call to reach out and help right in your own neighborhood, right in your own back yard, your county, your town.

"Tell them the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons."

Listen; Jesus isn't telling those apostles of his to do anything he hasn't already been doing.

He IS telling them that they have moved from being receivers of the goodness of God, to being strong enough to become the givers of the goodness of God. They will be sent out, and they will return, again, to Jesus.

Each of them was at some point in their discipleship, a student. A learner, a follower. Someone who sat at the feet of Jesus.

Jesus pushes them beyond.

This push, is often seen as the push to some sort of formal ministry. Surely, I have felt the push, as Jan feels it today. O sure, she just graduated from college yesterday (yay Jan!), but now she goes on to even more study and learning at Iliff Seminary. And she will sit at the feet of Jesus, be a student, a follower, receive the joy of the kingdom message, receive healing, receive the touch of Jesus. Because she is a learner.

But this isn't just for Jan. Or for me, as I continue to read, go to conferences or workshops, study groups, book groups, new church idea groups.

Why do we continue to offer "small groups" to our members? Why do we have the Adult Forum discussions on Sunday? Why do we teach our children and youth the stories of the Hebrew and Christian testament? Why do we encourage book groups, poetry groups, prayer groups, artistic expression, youth leaders?

Because, through whatever medium we can offer, we hear Jesus saying, "where are the harvest hands to help with all this need?"

Emily and Ethan can help their mother and their friend, who regularly bring beauty to our front altar.

Maya (and her sister Livia, who got dragged into it), can lead us in preparing for PRIDE.

Alisher, and Jasmine, and Sophie can share their music.

Our littlest ones can share their sweet, sunny selves, and joyous voices, and just make us laugh!

You are never too young to be a disciple. (Or too old, Jan!)

Maya, Livia, Frances, Tevita, Ethan, Emily, Jasmine, Alisher...you, too, will have a chance to touch the untouchable...I'll just bet that there is somebody at school, or in your life or your neighborhood who is in that lonely place of outsider, rejected one. Go to them. Try to be the friend they need. Friendship is so important! Kindness matters!

I'll just bet that there is somebody you know who is sick or sad, depressed or hopeless. They don't know how to hope, so share some of your hope, your love, your belief that it does get better; the sun shines out in joy on all of us, and yes, you are loved and supported by adults who care, so you will grow up to adulthood and you will make a difference!

Can you share, by being a loving, gentle, tough, smart, generous, Christian human being...that God is love and does love, all of us and all creation? That God does not reject us, despise us, or act cruelly against us?

Try, please try. We will try as well.

We all have to try to be "harvest hands". There is a lot of loneliness, sadness, hardship in the world, and in our own lives. To touch that, heal that, bring hope, joy, love, peace...it isn't a "professional job", it is our Christian "job", it is our compassionate human "job"!

The disciples weren't perfect when they were sent out.

Peter was impulsive.

Simon was a political firebrand.

Matthew was rich, and a collaborator with the enemy regime.

Judas would later turn Jesus in to the enemies.

We now believe, from studying the texts, that all of them were young, younger than Jesus. At least one was too young to grow a beard!

And later on, they all got scared and ran away. You can't wait to be perfect, we can't wait til we think we are 'ready'...we can begin now.

There is no age limit to doing good! There is no other time or place for being a disciple, a student of Jesus...and an apostle, too, one 'sent out' to give to the world.

Everywhere we look, if we look carefully, we can see the whole world crying out, "Hey, we sure could use some help over here!"

And you and I, all of us learners from Jesus, hear him saying..."Go".

Together, we will.