

*35Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*

*10Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.*

*5These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.*

When Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

When Jesus looks on his world today, who does he see that is harassed and helpless? A ten year old in Namibia who is the head of the household because his father and mother have died of Aids?

A man about to lose part of his leg because of infection caused by diabetes?

A four year old whose mother is in a drug induced fog?

A woman living with a man who has no intention of marrying her?

A six year old who is never hears the word, “No”?

A person in Kashmir or Liberia or Palestine who lives in a world gone mad?

Someone here today who has lost a sense of purpose in her living?

Back then Jesus gathered the twelve and sent them with these instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Jesus did not send them to everyone but only to the chosen people. Others, later, would be sent to the Samaritans and to Gentiles but for now the mission was limited.

Here is what they were to do: “As you go proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

As I preach to you this morning I have to make a number of decisions right here. Who are the ones who are sent today? To whom are they sent? Are you someone whom Jesus is sending someone to? Or are you the one being sent?

Is the mission the same now as it was back then? Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons? Today we would describe this mission as the work of medical experts. To do this mission would require doctors and nurses and pharmacists.

What about the good news that would be proclaimed? Is it still, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”? Or is the good news Jesus would send you with a message about him and his dying for sinners?

A lot of decisions!

What is my job today? To bring good news to harassed and helpless ones? You? Or is it to recruit laborers for the harvest – to organize and prepare you to go out to help and heal others?

This seems like an important question. Why are you here today? Are you here to help others to live under the rule of God in the way you live under God’s rule? Are you here to be organized into becoming help for Aids orphans in Africa and to support the proclaiming of the gospel in Japan and the feeding of the poor in East Cleveland? Are we gathering to work together to make this world a place where God’s justice rules over greed - God’s mercy over the survival of the fittest - God’s Word over lawlessness and chaos?

Or are you here as a lost lamb waiting to be found and brought home once more - each week brought home once more?

What is the church? Lost sheep Jesus is still trying to find? So often that is how I feel.

Or are we the found ones who are now being sent?

Well, what about those apostles Jesus gathered and sent on that day so long ago? Were they the ones who had it all together or were they still lost in some ways? Look at the list – Peter’s name is first – before long he would be swearing that he never knew Jesus. James and John would be asking Jesus to be given a place of higher honor than the rest of the disciples. Matthew in this list is still identified as a tax collector – a collaborator with the hated Roman government. Judas would be betraying Jesus. Matthew tells us that all the apostles would be running away at the moment of Jesus’ arrest. And yet Jesus sent these very ones to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.

Maybe like them you have a long way to go before God is really in charge of all your life. But still God sends you to be Jesus’ love for others. God won’t wait he is sure you won’t deny him, or sure that you will always put God first. God sends you now. And when you say yes, and give of your time and your money and your self you learn what it is to be ruled by God.

I want you to understand this – so many times I ask myself, “Who am I to preach to you about God ruling over your life when God rules over so little of mine? Who am I to talk to you about sacrificing to help others, and letting go of earthly treasures to have your treasures in heaven – when I myself fail in these very ways? But I can preach to you and you can give of yourself and your wealth in marvelous ways because it is God who is working in us and through us. God is the one who makes the word I proclaim a life giving word – God is the one who works miracles through the kindness and goodness and money you share.

One of our favorite songs this week was “God can do, oh, He can do, God can do anything. God can do, oh He can do, God can do anything.

Trust in God – take the first step – see what happens.