

The Second Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 9:35—10:8 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Dearly beloved:

LAST WEEK, we hear the Lord command:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

But THIS WEEK, we hear Him command the Twelve:

Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

AND, the Lord MIXES His METAPHORS! (Not complaining, dear Lord Jesus; I’m just saying...)

The people of His day were a harvest; and they were sheep. But MOST of all, they were the STUFF of Jesus’ petitions to His Heavenly Father; and the STUFF of OUR prayers, that He invites to pray with Him: ‘Let your Name be like no other; let your Kingdom come; and let your heavenly will be done among us too!’

In OTHER WORDS, our Lord is sweeping us up into the heart of Who He is and What He does: ‘Forgive us OUR trespasses, as WE have already forgiven those who trespass against us! And, dear Heavenly Father, as much as WE do not forgive those who sin against US, we are DEMANDING

that YOU do not forgive US!’

My dear ones, ONLY the sheep can hear that voice! We can ONLY be IN with God, if WE put as much work into being gathered to HIM, as the harvest in the field helps out the harvester. In OTHER WORDS, our SALVATION is a lot of WORK! ‘Pray the Lord of the harvest to send WORKERS into the field!’

We learn what THE WORK of the Kingdom of God is when we take it upon ourselves to let the next poor man know—that HE does not NEED GOD to forgive HIM, and make Him certain of his Heavenly Father’s care; because the next man has US!

As the Lord told the first twelve disciples, ‘Freely you have received! Freely give! You have received without paying; give without pay!’

What funny commands! Not at ALL like the commands of Moses: ‘Get in line with THIS, or ELSE! It is in YOUR HANDS—and it is a matter of LIFE AND DEATH—and you are on the razor’s edge! The ax is already at the root of the tree!’

No; when the One with all authority in heaven and earth COMMANDS His Church, He proclaims to us that HE came to us, COMES to us, without anything coming from US to HIM! This is the pledge and guarantee of JESUS’ Baptism, versus that of John!

To raise us from what we are by default, He—WITHOUT WAITING FOR ANYTHING FROM US!—proclaims again what He sent out the Twelve to proclaim: that in HIS COMING comes the Kingdom of God, so utterly unlike the Kingdom of Old. Instead, His Kingdom is new wine in new wineskins! MEANING, unlike the LAW, the GOSPEL GUARANTEE is that the LAST PLACE Heaven is going to investigate to determine Heaven's care for us, is US!

So much so, that the One Who has been GIVEN all authority in heaven and on earth puts the boldest of prayers on our lips—as if that prayer will find its way from our lips, to our eyes, to our faces, to our hearts; and maybe, even, to our words! As if WE are the VOICE of God Himself!

Again—this is the VOW, the PLEDGE, the OATH of the Blessed Holy Trinity, to all who are baptized into His Name! Who have IN HAND as much of their care as sheep do with a faithful shepherd, or as the harvest does with its own harvest home!

Which is why, my dear ones, the Lord of the Twelve and of the Church, sends out NOT mighty, gleaming, scary angels and archangels and all the company of heaven to proclaim these glad tidings! But instead, He sends out Judas—the BIBLE says!—Judas, who would betray Him; and Peter, who pledge on oath that he had NOTHING to do with Him; and the rest who ran away; some of whom, when they saw Him risen in Galilee and giving His charge—the BIBLE SAYS!—

doubted. Doubted WHAT?

There is ONLY ONE THING the New Testament would bother to point out as the object of DOUBTING—and that is the pledge and guarantee of the Gospel; the Happy Tidings, free of charge, that as far as the East is from the West—never to meet!—as far as Heaven is from the Earth—so far has God put away our sins; and He will never, to the End of this Age, treat us according to what we deserve!

Christ's Word of Honor—given by His suffering, death and burial—so CERTAINLY given, FREELY GIVEN—that our Lord has NO DOUBT that WE will join in His most happy of all WORK!

Which is the reason we hear about Him sending the Twelve ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Even though He sent the Eleven—Twelve minus the betrayer—to ALL NATIONS—The Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ does NOT waste His Breath upon those who are not the harvest, or not the sheep.

My dear ones: YOU qualify, if YOUR pardon does NOT match the pardon heaven has pledged to you in your Baptism! Just think of those who faults and failings are uppermost in your heart today. Oh, the Glad Tidings of the Gospel!

What comes from US to GOD is all lost, GREAT HEAPS of lostness; WORK on the part of God, and His Church, and

His harvesters.

But what comes from GOD to US now, is as freely given as Jesus' Body and His Blood; given and shed for ONE THING: to pardon His people and to gather in the harvest without any participation on our part; and to find, again, those who are lost.

Throughout the Summer, my dear ones, until November, when we hear together in Church the Lord admonishing His people Israel in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew—those words are aimed at US! Yes, to call us to repentance; but MOST OF ALL, to give us God, completely and utterly and perfectly, all over again!

There could not be more PERFECT messengers of this kingdom and Good News than you and I, dear sheep! For the world can only look in puzzlement, when we declare that WE are the center of God's universe! The world can only shake its head at that little flock and its claim that the world calls absurd.

But there are those, dear friends, who have nothing to offer heaven. And the prayers we pray and the Gospel we spread and the pardon we show in our lives, is meant for THEM, in the Name of Jesus! Amen!