

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 2A Proper 6A
June 14, 2020
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Sent to Shepherd

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. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:35-10:8 ESV)

Dearly Beloved of Christ, the Good Shepherd and only Savior of the world,

There's no doubt that we live in a world of turmoil and danger. We are continually harassed and helpless against the never-ending stream of news about Covid-19, protests, riots, violence, destruction, and more that assaults us almost every waking moment. And then there are the threats closer to home – health concerns (our own and of our loved ones), financial concerns, the overwhelming amount of stuff we have, a lack of necessities, the welfare of our children, and more. And that doesn't even touch upon the great temptations to ignore our Shepherd's voice, run away from Him, and be in true peril of body and soul.

Thanks be to God that for such a day as this we have the Shepherd we so desperately need. For as 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," He was simply being the Shepherd they needed. In His preaching, teaching, and healing, He was seeking the lost, the harassed, the helpless, and leading them to green pastures and beside still waters.

Now, while Jesus did heal many of their diseases, His primary task at this point was preaching and teaching. He continually called people to repent for the kingdom of God was at hand, that is, that the kingdom was present in Him. He continually called the people to trust in Him for forgiveness and salvation, and His healings were but evidence that He was the very Son of God who had come to save them. Furthermore, His compassion ran so deep that He would even die for them. Rather than leave them to suffer the pangs of sin and death and eternal torment themselves, He took their place, and yours, on the spit of the cross. There He suffered the full heat of God's wrath toward sin. The Shepherd offered Himself as the sacrificial Lamb, without spot or blemish. Then having atoned for the sins of the world, He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven where He continues to shepherd His flock.

And He did all this while we were still weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies of God. He didn't wait for us to make the first move. For like Adam we wouldn't, and couldn't. We would hide, living in

fear that we might be found out and punished. It is for people like us rotten sinners that the Father sent His Son to bear our sin, be our Savior, and reconcile us to God. Jesus did everything to set things right between us and God.

And that includes providing shepherds for His people. That's why He instructed His disciples to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Then, in answer to that prayer, He sent them out and equipped them with all that they needed. He "gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. . . And [to] proclaim . . . 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." As He did, so would His Apostles do. They would go in His Name and with His full authority. They would preach what He preached. They would do what He did. The miracles they would do would show that they were *His* sent shepherds. The miracles would verify/authenticate the message they proclaimed. They would continue His work, or rather, He would continue to do His saving work through them.

So the work of the Apostles was essentially the same as that of Jesus - preach, teach, heal. Thus would Jesus continue to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Thus would Jesus later seek the lost sheep of the Gentiles. And so it continues today. Almighty God continues to answer the prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest field. He continues to train and equip shepherds, pastors, who are then sent into the fields white [or ripe] unto harvest (John 4:35). They are to do what He has given them to do - preach, teach and heal - though not exactly as the Apostles did. The message is certainly the same. They call people to repent of their sins. They teach all things that Jesus had taught. They continually point people to Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the only Savior of the world. They preach that the kingdom of God is at hand in Christ Jesus. And the authority to heal is that of forgiving sins "in the stead and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ." Such authority is grounded, not in the person of the pastor, but in the office into which Christ has placed him. For the pastoral office is that of Christ shepherding the sheep of His flock.

Now we must be clear about this. This pastoral office, this office of the sent shepherds, is grounded in Christ and His office of the Good Shepherd. Indeed, the men so sent are nothing in and of themselves. They are also sinners for whom Christ suffered, died, and rose again. That's why Matthew records the list of those Apostles sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. There was nothing about them to commend them. They had nothing of which to boast other than the One who had called them and sent them. Indeed, Peter was impetuous and later denied the Lord Jesus. James and John, the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17), were glory seeking (Mark 10:35), hot-headed, and too eager to call down God's wrath (Luke 9:54). Matthew had been a tax collector. Even Judas, who later betrayed Jesus, was sent as an Apostle at this point. No, there was certainly nothing in them to commend themselves to such an office.

Yet, Christ had chosen them and given them all that they needed to do His work. And so it is today. All pastors are unworthy to be Christ's under-shepherds. But He has chosen them and given them all the gifts they need to do His work. He has sent them to do that work so that His sheep would be led to heavenly pastures. And while they are worthy of their hire, they do not

charge for the forgiveness of sins. For that forgiveness, earned by Christ on the cross, is given freely to them that they might give it freely to others. Forgiveness and eternal life is gift through and through, neither earned nor deserved by any of us.

Jesus says, “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” And before we pray, He answers. He has compassion on us. As the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, so does He bring us to Himself by the Gospel and make of us “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6) by our Baptism into Christ. For “all that the Lord has spoken” (Ex. 19:8), Christ has done for us. And having reconciled us to God He doesn’t leave us “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” He sends men with authority to “heal every disease and every affliction” by His forgiveness of sins. In their proclamation, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For where the Gospel is, there is Jesus with comfort and strength for His sheep. Thus He answers the prayer He commands us to pray. To Him be all the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener

Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg

1297 E 900 Ave.

Shobonier, IL 62885

church: (618) 846-8383