

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Pentecost 2, Proper 6, June 14, 2020

READINGS:

Exodus 19:2-8a

Psalm 100

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus called twelve ordinary men as disciples, saying to them, "Follow me". The word "disciple" comes from the Latin word *discipulos*, meaning student. So, a "disciple" is a student, one who learns from a teacher.

Jesus' disciples were definitely ordinary! Some of them were quite unexceptional fishermen. One was young and inexperienced. They argued among themselves about who was "the best" disciple. Matthew was a tax collector. Peter denied Jesus. Judas betrayed him. None would have been likely to make the Honor Roll!

Their names were ordinary, too, for their time: Simon (also called Peter) and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon (the Cananaean), and Judas Iscariot.

Hmm, we probably know people with most of those names today. Maybe they weren't so ordinary, after all, if children are named for them after more than 2,000 years!

The twelve disciples had been with Jesus, traveling, learning, and watching him teach and perform miracles. Today, in our reading from Matthew's Gospel, they will get a new assignment from their rabbi and become SOMETHING new!

Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion for the crowds, "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." There was so much need for the Good News, and

only one Jesus! So, Jesus gives his disciples authority and power to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal as he heals.

He tells them what they are to do. Because their mission can be dangerous, they must "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." They are to take no resources with them, depending on local hospitality for their support. They are to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons, just as Jesus does, and all at NO CHARGE! The mission of salvation must be freely available to everyone!

Then, he sends them out to "the lost sheep of Israel", including those on the margins of society, and the outcasts. From that moment, those ordinary disciples, with their ordinary names, become new people. They are "apostles" - those who are sent - messengers for the Kingdom of God!

I wonder if they stopped to think, on that day, of Moses setting before the elders of Israel all the Lord had commanded him, as we read from Exodus today. I wonder if they remembered what the people of Israel said in response: "EVERYTHING that the Lord has spoken we will do." WE WILL DO everything! That's a big order for ordinary people to fulfill!

Those first twelve apostles were not perfect. But they carried their Lord's "com-compassion", his feeling-with", out into the world they knew. They invited people into God's kingdom, a mobile kingdom without territory, or borders. A kingdom with no immigration restrictions, where everyone can enter, for free! And other ordinary people came to join them.

Throughout the history of the church, over and over down the ages, generation after generation, these ordinary apostles were replaced by others. THEY were not perfect, but they were empowered by the Holy Spirit in baptism, as Jesus promised they would be. In every generation, they carried their Lord's compassion to the world, and invited everyone to enter the Kingdom, for free! And other ordinary people came to join them.

And now, it is the Year of Our Lord 2020, and we are Christ's Body, his apostles, in OUR place and time. Through OUR baptisms, each of us has a place in God's kingdom, that mobile kingdom without territory or borders. It is OUR turn to carry our Lord's compassion into the world. It is OUR turn to invite everyone to enter the Kingdom, for free!

Each of us has places where we are called; to our families, schools, clubs, workplaces; among friends, strangers met on the street, or people we may never meet face to face. Our world has as many people who are "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" as Jesus saw and had compassion for in his day. As he sent the first apostles then, he sends us now.

Will we be perfect? No, we won't. It isn't easy to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves!

In our journey with the Lord, we will learn, as St. Paul says in today's reading from his letter to the Romans, that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us."

We will make mistakes and miss opportunities. Sometimes we just won't do what we know we should!

Maybe none of us will make the Honor Role, but we don't have to! We are ordinary people, after all!

Just ordinary people, with an endlessly forgiving Lord. Every day he calls us by our ordinary names, picks us up, dusts us off, and sends us back out into the world to try again. There, in the world we know, we will do the work he has given us to do.

"EVERYTHING that the Lord has spoken we will do", the people of Israel told Moses. We WILL do everything!! That is still a big order for ordinary people to fulfill!

But, if we just show the Lord Jesus to the people we meet, other ordinary people will come to join US, in his kingdom without territory or borders, full of hope, where everyone sooner or later belongs!

Amen.