

Introductory

The first section of this pericope (35 -38) is exclusive to Matthew. The second section (1-8) has parallels in Mark (6:7-13) and Luke (9:1-16). None of those texts are appointed to be read on any of the Sundays in the TLH one-year lectionary. This text is appointed to be read on The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost in Series A in the LW three-year lectionary.

Textual Notes

35. We find Jesus on the move, “Καὶ περιῆγεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας – and Jesus was leading through all the cities and villages.” The verb “περιάγω” is rare in the NT, with only three occurrences, the translations all miss it, and it means “to lead.” Perhaps it’s assumed that because the Twelve follow Jesus, He is as a matter of course leading them.

When we talk about great leaders, we don’t often talk about Jesus. I googled “great leaders,” and it was worse than I thought. Jesus is not even in the conversation. So, I googled “Jesus great leader,” and I’m not the only or the first to note that He is, and one of His greatest acts was to set it up for those who would follow Him and continue His work after He is gone, the reading today.

The picture painted here is of Jesus leading from the front, “διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν – teaching in their synagogues,” and we see Him, and later Paul – both learned Jewish men – going into the synagogue and when given the chance, they preach a sermon on the appointed text. Both men in turn would eventually be expelled from synagogue, as were early Christian Jews.

The content of His teaching is described as “καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας – preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom,” talking about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, one of many ways to proclaim the Christian religion. In Romans, Paul talks about sinners, justification, reconciliation, salvation, and he uses the metaphor of free gift, all in today’s epistle!

The Lutheran preachers have lately become overly fascinated with Paul’s declaration that he preaches “Christ and Him crucified,” as if that’s the only way to preach the Gospel. The sermon often ends up being a further articulation of Absolution. Paul didn’t think so – see his other writings as well as above – and neither did Jesus, or the OT prophets for that matter.

That was firstly what He did using words, and secondly, by actions, “καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν – and healing every incurable disease and every sickness.” There are two words for sickness. The first indicates a chronic and incurable disease. The second is talking about any disease that weakens or disables a person. Go ahead and shout out some examples.

One of the points here, and it's a point made often in the NT, is that Jesus never meets a disease He can't cure. Cancer seem to be the disease that scares people profoundly. Part of that is the way it sort of eats away at you, part of it is the suffering that often comes with the treatment, but mostly it's that once it comes, it never really goes away, and a lot of people die from it.

I know a man who had terminal cancer, and the only healing open to him – his words – was miraculous healing. Five years later, he still has terminal cancer, but then we're all terminal, aren't we. I have seen other instances of miraculous healing, and so have other people. The Christian knows that healing is going to come, either here or there – in heaven, where there is no disease.

36. I just talked about this last week, “Ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἐσπλαγχνίσθη περὶ αὐτῶν – when He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them.” It's the word for “guts,” and the British might say that “He was gutted,” but Americans don't talk like that, and the Lutherans eschew talking about emotion as much as they embrace talking about the cross. And yet, Jesus here has emotion.

The reason for it, “ὅτι ἦσαν ἐσκυλμένοι καὶ ἐρριμμένοι ὥσει πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα – because He saw that they were weary and cast off, like sheep not having a shepherd.” The words “weary” and “cast off” are both Perfect Passive verbs. They are the recipients of things done to them by somebody else – they are the victims of poor shepherding imposed by bad shepherds.

An author I was reading before breakfast used the “drip, drip, drip” metaphor to describe the constant and incessant attack on our Western Civilization, including and primarily the Christian religion. It's what the liberal Pastor do; they just keep hammering at it, they never stop, and eventually an individual here, a small group there the sheep just give up or give in.

The UCC church in the next town over began pushing the “open, affirming” thing several years ago, and once the Pastor, pushed by the denomination, started pushing for it, there was going to be one outcome possible. Members fought back, got tired, gave in, left, and in the end a once-strong congregation has been decimated and financially devastated. Same thing with the Methodists.

At one time, I would have said that Jesus here is calling a spade a spade, an ancient idiom, but let's go with the French (WIK) and say that here Jesus calls a cat a cat. Like Jesus, I also feel compassion for those poor souls with bad shepherds. One of the problems of talking like that is that it might come off as self-serving; look at me, I'm a good shepherd, aren't you lucky!

I think we were discouraged in Seminary (FW 85) from speaking critically of other Pastors. The prohibition was not limited to LCMS, but other denominational pastors as well, and we were still trying to lure ALC away from LCA. If that was ever a good idea, it is now a bad idea. In fact, at the expense of sacrificing faithfulness, we are pretty much compelled to speak out against them.

We are way past ever coaxing any liberal Lutheran brand over to our house, but more to the point the ELCA is a much different thing today than were her predecessors thirty-five years ago. Not

only do they reject basic Christian doctrine after basic Christian doctrine, they viciously attack those of us who stand on those same teachings. They have the form of religion, but...

On the one hand, the ELCA sheep cannot be blamed for following poor leaders. On the other hand – my laymen always remind me of this – you can switch churches any time. My congregation includes several former ELCA, and at least a couple – maybe three – have left my church and gone over to ELCA. It was about the time of gay marriage. They think it's okay, and we don't.

37. What do you do about bad shepherds? How about I send out a flock of new, good shepherds. Using the familiar agricultural metaphor, “τότε λέγει τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ Ὁ μὲν θερισμὸς πολὺς, οἱ δὲ ἐργάται ὀλίγοι – then He says to His disciples, ‘Indeed, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.’” Go ahead and stick with that metaphor, and if you have to explain it, then do.

Maybe talk about how it's harvest time, you have a bumper crop, but you can't find anybody to drive the combine. If you're in town, talk about the great yield of strawberries right now or the juicy peaches to come, but nobody wants to go out to the garden or the orchard to pick them. The heavy lifting has been done, the healthy and tasty food is there for the taking, but...

As is the case with preaching the Gospel, so when talking about missions Jesus uses several different metaphors to make several points. He talks about the fishermen catching fish. He talks about the same seed spread on different kinds of soil and He talks about different kinds of seed spread on the same soil. Go ahead and use that brain, get creative, and invent new metaphors.

38. It is noteworthy that Jesus makes that observation to “disciples,” the general term for Christians, and then He directs them, “δεήθητε οὖν τοῦ Κυρίου τοῦ θερισμοῦ ὅπως ἐκβάλῃ ἐργάτας εἰς τὸν θερισμὸν αὐτοῦ – Pray, therefore the Lord of the Harvest that He might cast workmen into His harvest.” The translations have Him praying God to “send” workers out.

There is a word for “send,” and with the Twelve the word commonly used is the word from which comes “Apostle” – sent, but here the verb is “ἐκβάλλω - to throw out.” The word occurs eighty more times in the NT. Mark uses it (1:12) to talk about how the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, and the writers use it all the time in reference to casting out demons (33 et al).

Diseases are likewise “cast out,” and so, Luke tells us, is Jesus from synagogue in Nazareth (4:29). The idea of forcible or forced activity cannot be denied here – though the commentaries ignore or try to soften the force. You would like to say that the Twelve went out willingly, but at the end of the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was again the thrower to them being thrown out into the World.

It's the way of things in the Church. The Twelve were all sent to a particular mission field, and as far as we know, none of them chose that field. Throughout Acts, we see the Holy Spirit telling Paul where to go, where not to go, and when. We observe that “The Holy Spirit” is the Church, and as to the question of exactly how The Church did that sending, Luke is not clear.

In fact, it looks to me like Luke is deliberately ambiguous when it comes to the nuts and bolts of how that sending – or not – was done. Over the years, the Church has used a variety of means and methods. Paul and Jesus started in the synagogue, but that’s not where we start today, nor should we. Popes, various mission societies, even individual congregations send out missionaries.

The norm for us used to be to send an American to a foreign country, and they would spend sometimes the rest of their lives there, and seldom if ever come home. In later times, we sent them, we paid them, and they came back periodically on furlough. Now, they go, they come back every few years to raise money, and the goal is to train natives to be the pastors of their own people.

However you go about it, and whatever your methodology, missionary work at its essence “casting out” men from the relatively safe and secure bosom of the Church into the shifting and often dangerous field of missions. It’s not exactly “sink or swim,” and they have a lot of prayer and other support, and we try to remove them from dangerous situations, but it’s close.

1. Having pointed out the lack of combine drivers, “Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς δώδεκα μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν – And summoning His twelve disciples, He gave them authority.” The verb προσκαλέω means not just to “call,” but to call or summon to oneself, and here Jesus is telling those Twelve to physically come to Him, and He gave to them “authority.”

That word for “authority” is common, with over one hundred NT appearances. Both are translated “authority,” but this is not the same word as the one in 1 Tim 2:12, where Paul tells the Pastor not to allow a woman to “αὐθεντέω” men. The word is a hapax in the NT. It’s hard to make a simple and clear exegetical case that there the prohibition is against women being pastors, but it is.

The authority given to them is said to be “πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων ὥστε ἐκβάλλειν αὐτὰ καὶ θεραπεύειν πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν – against unclean spirits, to throw them out, and to heal every incurable disease and every sickness.” As they have been “cast out” by the Church, they will be authorized to “cast out” evil spirits, as Jesus likewise also cast out the same.

Except for a different form of the same verb, the authority over sickness is exactly the same as the authority possessed by Jesus Himself, as articulated earlier (9:35). We don’t see the Twelve doing as much of those things as Jesus did, and what we do see is recorded in Acts, and we can rightly conclude that they did more of it than is recorded. Jesus did more than is recorded (John 20:30).

2 – 4. The Twelve are named, and go ahead, get out your harmonization to see that some people are called different names sometimes. Barclay penned *The Master’s Men* many years ago, but it’s still a good primer biography for them, and I quoted from it in the sermon three years ago. In addition, there is ample material on them, and people like to learn more about them and their work.

5. Those specific men, “Τούτους τοὺς δώδεκα ἀπέστειλεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς παραγγέλλας αὐτοῖς – These Twelve Jesus sent out, commanding them.” The verb of sending is that word from which comes

“apostle” (the verb ἀποστέλλω). Most translations have “charged” for the verb I rendered “commanding,” which is better, firstly because when people hear “charge” they think Visa.

The meaning of the word includes being given authority by a higher authority, and we have already seen that articulated in the preceding verses. The word also means that far from being thrown in to sink or swim, they have been thoroughly prepared, educated, and instructed for the task at hand. The Twelve have never been random, and they are not about to start being random now.

What we see here is eerily like what we do before we sent out missionaries and pastors. When He needed Apostles, Jesus personally chose some and likewise rejected others. There were always comers and goers during those three years, but these Twelve are always there, except for that time when He sent them out for a trial run. Far from being random, they are very knowingly sent.

The specific instruction begins with a pair of prohibitions, “λέγων Εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε καὶ εἰς πόλιν Σαμαρειτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε – saying, ‘do not go off into the road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans.’” These two are generally treated as two peas in a pod, but I don’t think so. They are two separate commands to do two different things.

If you’ve been around Dr. Weinrich lately, then you know he has some ideas about “the way,” especially as used by John. There is “the road” that is Christian (with OT roots), and the command to stay off the “road of the Gentiles” is simply that. Persecution and hardship will come, and some of it will be from Gentiles, the Greeks and Romans as well as every pagan people they went to.

If you want to know what it would look like for Christians to exit off the Christian Road and enter onto the Gentile Road, look around you. Look around and see all the poor and faithless shepherds. Have compassion on their charge because they are like sheep sans shepherds. Others have beaten me to the punch by decades; a lot of these churches can’t even be called “Christian” anymore.

The second distinct command is to avoid going into any Samaritan city. The encounter with Well Woman (John 4) went well. She (15) wanted the living water, at the end of the day “Many Samaritans believed” (39), and He told His disciples that the fields of Samaria were “white for harvest” (35). But generally, they avoided Samaria for reasons familiar to you.

It is true that missionary work generally takes place across cultural lines; the Word in the form of a missionary comes to one group of people from an outside group of people, but that doesn’t mean that every group should send missionaries to just any other group of people. In western Germany, the people were friendly and welcoming, and many of them spoke English without prompting.

In eastern Germany, we discerned that older Germans often disliked us when they discerned that we were Americans. In Wittenberg, we went to a restaurant, and a man who was clearly the owner said “no” as soon as he discerned. We protested to the hostess “but there’s a lot of room,” and he said “no,” so we left. There’s some baggage still between America and former GDR citizens.

Probably Americans would not be the best choice to do missionary work in the former GDR. We do; the LCMS has a presence in Wittenberg, and the youngearer eastern Germans are like western Germans, I'm just saying. The Italians don't like Americans (see World War II), and they don't care at all for German Lutherans, who invaded and did very bad things (see Thirty Years' War).

The Twelve would have carried a lot of baggage to Samaria, and there were plenty of other places – it's a big world, so maybe work up to that. Maybe He's telling them to stick to the country. At any rate, we read this in the light of the pre-Ascension command (Acts 1:8) to start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, and *then* go ahead and make your way to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

6. To those prohibitions He adds this directive, “πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ – Go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” To review; the Ten Lost Tribes were lost when Assyria committed genocide against them in the 8th Century B.C. They were “lost” by means of forcible assimilation with other, non-Hebrew people.

In the 700+ years since – to go back 700 years takes us to the year 1320 A.D. – the blood of those ten tribes had spread quite a way. The “lost sheep of Israel” are, then, everybody except the tribe of Judah. This command is very much in line with the command we read last week, pre-Ascension, that they were to go to “all nations” = all ethnic groups and teach, baptize, and the like.

After the initial missionary effort among the Jews on Pentecost, following the command to bear witness in that increasingly large circle, that's exactly where the Twelve went. They went to every corner of the known world. Find out those places by looking at Barclay or the Internet, include that or those stories to your hearers, and it will help make for a good and interesting sermon.

7. Like a lot of Christian ideas, the idea that preaching should be apocalyptic comes from Jesus, who here says “πορεύόμενοι δὲ κηρύσσετε λέγοντες ὅτι Ἦγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν – going, preach, saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is near,” and it is. People especially need to hear this with all that is going on in the world, and it's always something, isn't it?

Christians are very aware of this teaching, and of the calamity that will come before the Second Coming. I was talking to one of my little old ladies yesterday. She was noting how bad things are, and thinking that maybe the end is near, and who am I to argue that point. The takeaway is that it gave her great comfort to know that one day this will be gone, and only heaven eternally.

8. I will probably say at some point on Sunday that Jesus never tells us to do anything He hasn't already done Himself, and they will do all He tells them to do. Something else He has done and now tells them to do, “δωρεὰν ἐλάβετε, δωρεὰν δότε – freely you have been given, freely give.” The word “freely” is the word associated with “gift,” and how much do I owe you for that?

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