

The 2nd Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 16, 2017

Matthew 9: 35-10:8: *Can Jesus Count on You?*

Preached

By

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In the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A little boy was asked to go somewhere by his dad. The boy looked at him and said, "I ain't going." Well, his dad did not like that kind of language, and he said, "Son, you're not supposed to use the word 'ain't', that is not proper English." The father then proceeded to give his son an English lesson. He said, "Now listen carefully, first person singular, I am not going; second person singular, You are not going; third person singular, He is not going; first person plural, We are not going; second person plural, You are not going; third person plural, They are not going." He said, "Now son, do you understand it?" His son said, "Yes sir, it looks like ain't nobody going." Well, that is the problem nobody's going, or at least not enough. You know, there are only two gears in a Christian's motor, "go" and "no." So, ask yourself, which gear are you in?

I read a story of a military patrol during the Viet Nam War that was reconnoitering enemy territory. They were tense, their ears were like antenna, their eyes like radar, and all of a sudden out of the darkness of the night there was a blinding flash, and the point soldier was mortally wounded.

While the sergeant screamed for the unit to take cover, a young recruit plunged ahead to the dying man. He, too, was wounded. In extreme pain, mustering his ebbing strength, he dragged his now dead friend back to the unit and collapsed. Above the roar of the battle the sergeant yelled at the young recruit, "You fool, why did you go get yourself shot for a dead man?" The recruit said, "Sergeant, I had to hear him say, 'I knew you would come.'"

My sisters and brothers in Christ, our Gospel reading from Matthew focuses us on the evangelistic job of the church. To carry out our mission of evangelism, we must feel what Jesus felt and we must love at Jesus loved.

So, we begin by anchoring our concern for evangelism in Christ's compassion for the world. Compassion is the only reason Jesus sends us out to make new disciples. We read in Matthew 9:36, "*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*" Can you think of a better description of many people today than this: "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd?" Can't you see a flock of sheep milling around in a pen? Frightened and

confused, they stumble blindly, bumping helplessly into one another, because they don't know which way to turn. So many of us are a reflection of our American culture. We live our lives as rugged individualists who arrogantly believe we go it alone and have no use nor much less want a shepherd.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, we frantically slave away for possessions we believe to be valuable only to have these false gods turn out to be a fraud, and for what? People chasing after dreams that only end in heartaches. People worshipping idols that can never bring them real happiness. *“When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus had compassion on the crowds.*

We need to see that when we try to reach out to people in Christ's name. It is not because we are merely seeking to build up our church membership, although that is part of it. Primarily, it is because we believe Jesus Christ can help people put their lives in order. It is because we believe that Jesus can help people live their lives, that Jesus can bring them God's love and forgiveness, that Jesus can bring them peace that only God can bring, that Jesus can bring them joy in living. So, how can that be? It is because Jesus has accomplished our salvation and brings that Good News to the whole world through us, His disciples. Evangelism is always anchored in Christ's compassion for people. It hurts our Lord watching people make a mess of their lives because they have

the wrong values and refuse the hand of God which is always extended. Jesus wants them to know there is a better way.

My dear friends in Christ, many folks today feel unloved and undervalued. They feel estranged from other people and from God. For example, you're probably aware that more people are living alone today than ever before. For some that is by choice. But for many others, it is because of divorce or the death of their spouse. Many of us have known both of those losses. Loneliness is a major problem in today's world. Our young people are trying to figure out who they are and what they are where they are going. They become lonely because they feel as though they don't fit in.

Are you aware that we are in the midst of our nation's deadliest drug epidemic, ever? In a recent trend, heroin smuggled into this country from China has been laced with carfentanil, a drug that is 100 times stronger than the opioid fentanyl; the primary use of carfentanil is to sedate elephants. Drug addiction crosses all ages and every spectrum of society. The addiction rates and the number of overdose deaths have soared. We have been touched by this here in Holy Trinity Church just recently with the death of Bradley Lawrence. Many of our people young and our elderly are becoming prescription drug and alcohol dependent. Many of our young people are

taking their own lives. Five boys that Bradley knew died from drug overdoses so, we lift our eyes and hearts to Heaven and we ask does anyone care? The answer is a resounding YES! God our Heavenly Father cares.

There is a beautiful scene in the movie *Dr. Zhivago*. The Comrade General is talking with Tanya, who, unbeknownst to her, is Zhivago's daughter. He is asking her about one of the traumatic experiences in her childhood, a time when she became separated from her adoptive father, a lawyer named Komarov. He asks her, "How did you come to be lost?"

She replies, "Well, I was just lost."

He asks again, "No, how did you come to be lost?"

Tanya doesn't want to say. She says simply, "I was just lost. My father and I were running through the city and it was on fire. The revolution had come and we were trying to escape and I was lost."

The Comrade General asked more emphatically, "How did you come to be lost?"

She still didn't want to say. Finally, though, she did say. "We were running through the city and my father let go of my hand and I was lost." Then she added plaintively, "He let go of my hand." This is what she didn't want to say.

The Comrade General said, “This is what I’ve been trying to tell you, Tanya. Komarov was not your real father. Zhivago is your real father and I can promise you, Tanya, that if your father had been there, your real father, he would never have let go of your hand.”

My sisters and brothers, your real Father will never let go of your hand. That is the difference between a real father and a false father, is it not? A real father would never let go of his daughter’s hand. That is also the difference between a real God and a false god. Many people link themselves to false gods such as power, wealth, physical appearance or the approval of their peers. We become addicted to the pantheon of false gods and soon than later each of these gods betrays us. They can take us only so far and no farther. Then they, too, let go of our hand. Only one God is sufficient in every circumstance in life and beyond. It is the eternal God, the God who made God’s self known in Jesus of Nazareth. And this brings us to the reason why evangelism, seeking to help people know Jesus, is so important. Matthew writes, “*Jesus turned to his disciples and said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”* He is talking about the work of evangelism. He is talking about reaching out to people and bringing them into His family. We are called to be workers in the harvest field. Can you see that the disciple’s only motivation for what we call

evangelism is Jesus Christ's great compassion for the world? We can say no or we can say go to this mission.

My sisters and brothers, the church is not a business enterprise. Our motive is not a more impressive financial bottom line. Our goal is not to enhance Episcopal pride. Our aim is not to be the biggest and the best. There are people outside the walls of this church who are confused, angry, hurting and dying. There are families that are disintegrating, young minds being destroyed by drugs, old folks feeling forgotten. The need is almost overwhelming. Truly the harvest is plentiful. The recruit said, "Sergeant, I had to hear him say, 'I knew you would come.'" Will someone say to you, "I knew you would come? Will someone say to you, "My life is so much better because of you?

It begs the question, so where are the workers? Where are those committed to being the body of Jesus Christ in ministry to this world? Where are those who will point their family, loved ones, friends, and co-workers to the only One who can satisfy their needs in all circumstances for now and eternity? Now, I'm not talking about button-holing people on the street. I'm not talking about an offensive holier than thou kind of sanctimonious salesmanship. I'm talking about caring enough about people that you try to help them out of their

confusion, loneliness and fear. So, where are the workers? Where are those who care enough to become involved in the lives of others? Where are those willing to take their time to show love to our young people and our old folks, to the substance abuser, to the man sitting in jail, to the victims of broken families, to the down and out as well as the up and in? To this very day, Christ continues to ask His disciples, where are the workers? The disciple's challenge is simple, can Jesus Christ count on you? AMEN.