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Matthew 9:35-10:8

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 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 ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

10 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Background

Matthew is a gospel full of detailed vignettes. We get small glimpses of what it was like to be with Jesus during the height of his ministry. Jesus,

at this point, is trying to prepare his followers for life without him. In your own devotional period, reflect back to Matthew 6 and focus on the Lord's Prayer. How does the Lord's prayer function for you after reading this passage?

Today's lesson will focus on the communal work to build the kingdom of heaven.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. What does heaven look like to you?

What's happening during this passage?

Jesus is doing what Jesus does-- he's teaching, of course. But not only is he teaching, he's meeting the material needs of the people. He's the People's Doctor, only he doesn't expect a co-pay! People were in need of healing. Jesus looks to the crowd and feels "compassion," because they were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Upon seeing this, he tells the disciples that the "harvest is plentiful, but laborers are few." This scene is important because it lists the twelve disciples who Christ commissioned. Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddeus, Simon and Judas. At this point in Jesus' ministry, Jesus tells the disciples that they must **go** to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Through all this, Jesus reminds the disciples that when they preach, they should remind people that "the kingdom of heaven is near." Along with this reminder comes a task-- cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

What is the kingdom of heaven?

It's going to take some Greek translation just to *attempt* to get to the bottom of this meaning. The word for kingdom (basileia) refers to royal "power, kingship, dominion, or rule." It's where many Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities get the name for their president, the "Basileus." The Greek word for heaven (ouranos) refers to the heavens as a metaphysical space.

It is imagined as a place beyond this one. Frequently in the book of Matthew, the word "heaven" comes attached with a vision of something beyond this world. Matthew 3:17 describes a voice "from heaven saying, this

is my Beloved son.” Matthew 5:10 describes people who are persecuted for righteousness for “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 12:50 shows us a Jesus who knows that whoever does the will of my Father “which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Heaven has concrete consequences. It is not described as some far-off place with a bouncer who can kick you out. Heaven is talked about in the context of relationship, in the context of a socially just world, in the context of the human family. And to add to all of that, Jesus uses the word “kingdom” which directly contrasts the Earthly Kingdom.

Think of the Hallelujah Chorus.

“The kingdom of this world;

Is become

The kingdom of our Lord,

And of His Christ

And of His Christ

And He shall reign for ever and ever.”

What does Jesus witness in the crowd?

Jesus sees a vulnerable crowd. And he didn’t just hear a rumor about it! He knows they are vulnerable because he has an intimate encounter with the people. He knows because he is on the road, teaching and proclaiming the good news, and healing every disease. He can make this assessment because he is intimately connected to the people. As he’s doing his work, he realizes that the people are in need. The writer of Matthew describes Jesus as “having compassion for them” because he could tell that they were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Why is this the text where Jesus calls the disciples?

Jesus knew that he couldn’t do this healing work alone. The harvest is PLENTIFUL! He knew, also, that the people needed more than what they had in that moment.

Last week, we talked about the gospel going viral for the right reasons. Here, Jesus furthers that idea. We need people to be trained and equipped to “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” When this happens, the kingdom of heaven has come near. We bring forth the kingdom of heaven when we take care of one another. Jesus saw that his people had *great* need, so he invited and empowered people to do a work that continues. Jesus prepared his disciples to continue

the work even after he'd leave them. The call to build loving and healthy communities doesn't end with Christ. It doesn't end with us, either. The baton passes on.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

A Georgia jogger, Chloe Dorsey rescued a deer who got stuck in a fence *twice*. While on her routine jog, she saw the deer stuck between two metal bars. Apparently, the deer had tried to escape, but was too wide to fit. The deer was nervous and bouncing about. She successfully freed the



deer within a few minutes. So Chloe began to go about her day, until she realized that the deer got stuck again between another set of bars. Only this time, the bars were thicker and harder to move. Eventually, Chloe was able to free the deer, but not without uttering some pretty comical lines.

“What’s going to happen when I’m not here?” “You need to learn how to jump, boo.”

And then, a yell to the deer’s friends, “you all need to teach her how to jump!”

Sometimes we get stuck. And embarrassingly enough, sometimes we get stuck multiple times. Christ intervenes and opens pathways for us. Christ looks at us and has compassion. He can see the traps around us that would leave us “harassed and helpless.” And Christ compels our friends to help us get free, because he won’t always be around to do so himself. The good news is what frees us.

Journal: Jesus gives the disciples a clear direction. “Proclaim the good news and cure the sick...” What are some other needs in your community? In your household? Personally? Write those down and we’ll pray over them later.

Closing: Sing/watch “There’s Not a Friend,”

*There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,
No, not one! No, not one!
None else could heal all our soul's diseases,
No, not one! No, not one!*

*Jesus knows all about our struggles,
He will guide till the day is done;
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,
No, not one! No, not one!*

Prayer:

Dear God,
You look into our world and you have compassion. We thank you for seeing our needs and caring about us. You know our needs.
God, you know our struggles because you’re in our community. You’re in our homes. You’re in our hearts. You know what we need, even when we are “harassed and helpless.” You can see us struggle. You never judge us for needing you.
God, we want to help the Kingdom of Heaven. We may not be able to heal bodies, but maybe we can be an advocate for a friend going to the doctor. We may not be able to raise the dead, but we can keep the names of our lost ones lifted. We may not be able to cast out demons, but we can tell the truth about the world we see.
In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen.

Works Cited:

Blue Letter Bible

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/deer-georgia-jogger-rescues-doe-stuck/story?id=65842879>