

**"The Making and Sending of Messengers"**  
**Sermon Series *The King and His Kingdom***  
**Rev. Dr. Peter B. Barnes**  
**First Presbyterian Church – Winston-Salem, NC**  
**November 19, 2017**  
**(Mt. 9:35-10:4)**

**Introduction.**

When I think of the history of missions in our church, one couple in particular comes to mind – Jule and Nancy Spach. Nancy was raised in Greensboro but started coming to this church with her sister, and Jule grew up at Centenary Methodist Church down the street. When they met and fell in love, Jule saw the light and became a Presbyterian, and it wasn't long before they sensed a call to overseas missions and went to Brazil under the auspices of the Southern Presbyterian Church. They served there for over 25 years before returning to the United States.

When I moved to Winston-Salem five years ago, Molly Johnson introduced my late wife Lorie and me to the Spachs, and we had a delightful time getting to know them. I had heard of Jule before. He was legendary in the circles I ran around in in the old Southern Presbyterian Church, so I felt like I was meeting Presbyterian royalty! They told us amazing stories of what God did through their ministry in Brazil and then later when Jule served as the moderator of the General Assembly. Later on I read a book about Jule's life, and it's an amazing tale of how God sent two workers into a field that was ripe for harvest.

Have you ever thought about where the whole idea of missions ever came from? Was it just a notion that a few zealous Christians came up with, and they set out to send people overseas to be heralds of the Good News of Jesus Christ? No. As we read in our text this morning, the whole idea of Christian missions originated with Jesus Himself when He sent out the 12 disciples.

In Matthew's gospel, this passage represents the beginning of the next major section of teaching by Jesus. You'll recall that the first section of teaching in Matthew appears in chapters 5-7, and it's commonly referred to as The Sermon on the Mount. Some scholars have called this second section of teaching "The Sermon on Mission." I like that distinction.

As we consider the making and sending of messengers and the mission of Christ today, there are three matters that I want you to consider with me this morning. They are: 1) the heart of Jesus; 2) the request of Jesus; and 3) the mission of Jesus.

**I. The Heart of Jesus.**

*"When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36).* The answer to the question as to why Christianity has always had an emphasis on missions is because Jesus had a heart for people and a burden for the lost. The Greek verb that is translated "had compassion" here literally means "to feel in the intestines." It's the strongest word for pity and empathy in the Greek language. It describes a compassion which moves a person to the deepest parts of his/her being. Our Lord felt deeply for people who were lost this world.

Jesus was moved to compassion by the world's *pain*. He cared about the sick, the blind, and

for those who were held in the grip of evil. Jesus was moved to compassion by the world's *sorrow*. The sight of the widow at Nain, following the body of her son out to be buried, touched His heart, and He wept at the grave of His friend Lazarus. Jesus was moved to compassion by the world's *loneliness*. When He saw a leper, an outcast of society, living a life of loneliness and abandonment, He did something about it. And Jesus was moved to compassion by the world's *confusion*. That's what moved Him on this particular day. The crowds of people looked to Him like sheep without a shepherd. They didn't know which way to go.

The word that is translated in this passage "harassed" is the Greek word *skulo*. It also means "to vex, trouble or to annoy." And the word that is translated "helpless" is the Greek word *ripto*. It means "to hurl, throw, cast down, or scatter." Have you ever felt like that? Vexed and troubled, hurled down and thrown about by the difficulties of life?

In John 10 Jesus is described as the Good Shepherd. He's the One who was willing to sacrifice Himself for His sheep. He talked about leaving the 99 in order to find the one who was lost. And He spoke of the kind of compassion we're all supposed to have when he said to the apostle Peter in John 21, "Feed my lambs.... Take care of my sheep.... Feed my sheep."

When you look at the people around you, are you moved by compassion? When you read the news or learn about a situation of suffering or tragedy in another part of the country or even half way around the world, does it touch your heart? Or are you so busy chasing the American dream, running your kids to soccer practice, or trying to keep up the Joneses that you don't have time, you don't take the time, to notice the pain and suffering of people around you?

There is actually something actually called "compassion fatigue." It describes the phenomenon of becoming calloused to the problems of people and the suffering around you. Jesus never experienced that. He always had room in His heart to care about one more hurting person, and so should we.

## **II. The Request of Jesus.**

*"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field'" (9:37,38).* Notice the realism of Jesus in this passage. He acknowledged that the task is a big one. The number of people who do not know the Lord is large, and by contrast the number of people who are engaged in His work is small. But the only reality that is worth noting in this equation is the variable of God. Christ refers us to the Father, and He encouraged His disciples to boldly ask the Lord to send out workers into the harvest. Prayer is the source of mission from the human side of things even as compassion is the source of mission from the divine side.

Have you ever considered just how important prayer really is to the enterprise of missions? I think of the first occasion when the disciples actually embarked on telling other people the Good News of Jesus after His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven. Do you remember when it happened? It was on the day of Pentecost when the early believers were gathered together in an upper room. They met there for prayer, and while they were praying the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to declare the wonders of God in other languages and spilled out into the street. A crowd of people gathered to check out the disturbance, and Peter seized the opportunity to tell them about the Lord Jesus. 3,000 people made a commitment to Christ that day, and they were baptized. Talk about a new covenant partner assimilation problem! It all happened as a result of prayer.

I think of the first time the early church ever sent out missionaries to go overseas. This is recorded in Acts 13. We're told that while the church in Antioch was gathered together to

worship and fast, the Holy Spirit said to them, "*Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" The church leaders laid their hands on these two men and sent them out for missionary service. That began one of the most prolific ministries of church planting all over the world for the next 30 years as Saul of Tarsus, whose name was later changed to Paul, responded to the call of God for missions. It happened while people were praying

And I think of the Haystack revival in 1806. In August of that year, Sam Mills and four other students from Williams College in Massachusetts were caught in a thunderstorm while returning from a time of prayer on the banks of the Hoosack River. They sought refuge under a haystack while they waited for the storm to pass. The focus of prayer that day had been for an awakening of foreign missionary interest among college students, and Mills talked about their own missionary obligation as followers of Christ.

He encouraged his companions with the words that later became a watchword for them, "We can do this if we will." It was from that haystack meeting that the Student Volunteer Movement was born in this country, and the first American foreign missionaries were sent out in 1812 – all as a result of prayer. Prayer is the source of mission from the human side of things even as compassion is the source of it from the divine side.

Since I moved to Winston-Salem five years ago, I've been greatly impressed with the number of people I've met in this community to have a burden to pray for this city. David Beaty is a pastor in town, and he gathers other pastors together on a monthly basis to pray for each other and to pray for our city. John Bost, who used to be mayor of Clemmons, has been praying for Winston-Salem for more than 30 years. And he senses that we are on the verge of God moving in powerful ways to do something new in our community. I'm convinced that the emergence of Love Out Loud and the world of Chuck Spong is the result of God's answer to that prayer. Churches are coming together as never before to see what we can do collectively to impact the kingdom and change our city.

Mission is a divine matter, and the more we can become engaged with the ministry of prayer the greater will be our opportunity to see God move in new ways. Attempts to carry out mission that depend largely on programs or pleas for more money or the recruitment of volunteers but bypass prayer are doomed to failure. Where there is prayer, there is mission; where there is little prayer, there will be little mission. It's just that simple.

Do you pray for the mission of this church? Do you intercede for the missionaries we support or the mission partners we have right here in Winston-Salem? Have you asked that the Lord will send laborers in the harvest? And are you willing to be one of those workers yourself and become an answer to your own prayer?

### **III. The Mission of Jesus.**

*"[Jesus] called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness....These twelve Jesus sent out..." (10:1,4).*

I think that it's interesting that the word Jesus uses in His request is the simple and unpretentious word "workers." Jesus didn't tell them that the need was for leadership, or for experts, or even for particularly passionate people. The need was simply for workers. You don't have to be an evangelist. You don't have to be a theologian. You don't have to be a great Bible scholar. You don't even have to have it all together. You simply need to be a worker. And God can use all sorts of people with all sorts of skills and backgrounds and from all walks of life in order to accomplish His mission in the world. Are you willing to be a worker for Jesus and join

Him on His mission of love for a lost and broken world?

It takes all kinds of people to do the work of God. The list of names of these men reveals that Jesus does His work of mission through a diversity of individuals who are very different from each other. In this ragtag group we find a tax collector and a zealot – sworn enemies of one another. We find fishermen and a traitor. But most importantly, we find people who Christ called to be His disciples, and that became the critical qualification. They were called by Jesus, and then they were appointed to be His apostles, His sent-ones, who would carry out His mission in the world.

The names on this list are the names of people that Jesus recruited, and the fact of the matter is that He is still looking for workers today. Will you add your name to the list? Will you be numbered among the workers of Christ, His ambassadors sent out into the world?

The story is told of Carl Sandburg, the great American writer, who as a college student took his roommate home to visit for the holidays. As Carl introduced his roommate to his hard-of-hearing aunt, he announced, "Auntie, I want you to meet my roommate, Al Specknoodle!" The aunt cupped her ear and shook her head. Carl tried again, "I want you to meet my roommate, Al Specknoodle!" The aunt frowned and shook her head once again. Carl shouted once more, "Al Specknoodle, my roommate!" Finally the aunt said, "It's no use, Carl. No matter how many times you say it, it still sounds like Al Specknoodle!"

No matter how many times or how obviously God has announced the clear purpose of His mission on earth, it seems we never quite get the message. Tell me, has there ever been a time in history when the world has been more ripe for the Gospel than now? People are searching for God, and they don't know where to find Him. The world feels like such a dangerous place these days, and fear has people asking spiritual questions. The harvest is ripe, but the workers for Christ are few? What are we going to do about that?

I look at Winston-Salem, and it seems to me that so many people in this community are like sheep without a shepherd, just like Jesus described. Parents get divorced, and kids are struggling. The city is divided by state highway 52, and it's emblematic of the racial divide in this community. The Winston-Salem area ranks #16 out of 20 worst in the nation for families with children with food insecurity. And more than 50% of school children in our community receive a free or reduced-priced lunch at school. The need for mission is great.

Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into the field of Winston-Salem, into the field of this state, into the field of this nation, into the field of this world. God has called us to mission, and we're invited to take our place in His corps of workers. Will you be one of them?

### **Conclusion.**

I close with this. April 15, 1912, is a famous day. It was on April 15<sup>th</sup> that Fenway Park opened in Boston, and it's still one of the greatest baseball parks in the country. However, April 15, 1912, is also famous for another reason. It is the day the great ship the *Titanic* sunk in the Atlantic Ocean. While you may know of the sinking of the *Titanic*, what you may not know is the story of the rescue.

There were actually two boats in that same area of the ocean that night. One ship, the *Californian*, was close enough to see the lights on the *Titanic*. Recent research shows that this ocean liner, which was on its way to Boston, was around 4 miles away from the *Titanic*. The *Californian* had entered the same ice field as the *Titanic*, and out of concern for danger, she dropped her anchor for the night. They had warned the *Titanic* by wireless earlier that day of the

impending danger. Once the *Titanic* hit an iceberg and realized it was in trouble, the ship sent a distress signal to the *Californian*, but the message came 10 minutes after the wireless operator on the ship had gone to bed for the night.

The *Californian* received no visible distress signal from the *Titanic*, but the watchman on duty saw seven flares in the sky, seemingly sent up by the troubled ship. The watchman woke up the Captain, Stanley Lord, but after discussion, they didn't know what to make of the flares and concluded they were signaling a warning to another ship. And the captain when back to bed. When the red lights on the *Titanic* submerged beneath the icy waters, those on watch thought the ship had left the ice field. While the passengers on the *Titanic* were in dire straits, the passengers on the *Californian* slept in comfort and complacency. If the *Californian* had responded, think of how many more people they could have rescued. There were only four miles away.

However, there was another ship in the ocean that night, the *Carpathia*. It was the vessel that answered the call to help. The *Carpathia* was on a cruise bound for the Mediterranean, but they became a mission. (I'm fascinated by that image – a cruise ship that became a mission.) Captain Rostron daringly and heroically entered the ice field that night, and they stoked the fires of the ship and proceeded from 14 knots to 17 knots dodging but not slowing down for even the icebergs. The *Carpathia* was over 58 miles away, and yet miraculously they arrived at the scene of the disaster by 4 a.m. All the passengers and crew – attorneys, physicians, teachers, cooks, factory workers, all of them – transformed the cruise liner into a hospital. They worked and together they saved the 705 survivors of the *Titanic*.

One ship slept comfortably while another was on mission. Which ship is this congregation like? Which ship do we want to be like? How is God calling us to join Him on His mission of love in the world?

Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.*" (Mt. 9:37,38). How is God calling you? Be a worker for God today and look for the ways that He wants to use you to touch the lives of the people all around you in the coming week. Amen.