

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Our own Dr. Scaer calls this section of Matthew that we have begun today Matthew's Second Discourse; others call it Matthew's Missionary Discourse. In it, Jesus sends forth the apostles into the harvest fields. Scaer says, "In terms of later dogmatic categories, Matthew's Second Discourse would fall in the category 'On the Ministry' because Jesus' ministry is given to the Twelve" (David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, p. 265).

That's what this Gospel is about — Jesus' own ministry is continued in the ministry of the apostles. Even as Jesus was "*teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,*" so the apostles were to "*proclaim*" in their going "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" As Jesus had shown "*compassion*" upon the people, going "*throughout all the cities and villages, ... healing every disease and every affliction,*" so the apostles were sent out with a similar commission and with "*authority*" "*to cast out*" "*unclean spirits,*" "*and to heal every disease and every affliction.*"

This continuity with Jesus is important for the growth and life of the church. We know that Jesus builds His church upon Himself as the chief cornerstone, and it's built on the proclamation of His death and resurrection. Jesus is "*the stone that the builders rejected*" (1 Pet. 2:7); He is the "*living stone rejected by men*" (1 Pet. 2:4). Jesus and Peter's confession of Him as "*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" is the Rock upon which "the church" stands, even when everything is falling and crumbling around us (LSB645:1).

But Paul reminds us that we are also built on Jesus' continued ministry done through the apostles. We are "*living stones*" in "*a spiritual house*" (1 Pet. 2:5) "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.*" We've been "*joined together*" through their message "*into a holy temple in the Lord,*" "*into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit*" (Eph. 2:20-22). The Christian Church is an "apostolic" church founded on an "apostolic" word. "I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church," we confess (Nicene Creed).

The Twelve were sent out in our Gospel — "apostled," if you will. They were commissioned by the Good Shepherd to tend those "*harassed and helpless*" "*sheep without a shepherd.*" This time they would return to Jesus and report back; but a time would come when they would be sent out again, when Jesus departed from them into the clouds, and they would "*be [Jesus'] witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

This time, the Twelve went forth with faith, depending wholly on God's provision through faithful people. The Twelve went forth with courage, being

warned that they would face opposition and rejection and accusation: *"I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."* The Twelve went forth in the Spirit: *"do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."* The Twelve went forth proclaiming peace from God. The Twelve went forth into a plentiful harvest, though they were few ... twelve only, but with prayers that *"the Lord of the harvest"* would later *"send out [more] laborers into his harvest."*

The next time, it would be similar but more intense. The next time, the Twelve would also go forth in faith, but a faith that had witnessed not only Jesus' cross, but also His resurrection. Bolstered by this knowledge and the promise that He would be with them always, they went forth in fearless faith. The next time, the Twelve went forth in courage undeterred by a redoubled opposition bent on the destruction of this Jesus sect. They knew that tribulation would come, and it did. They were met with floggings and imprisonment and even death, but they were undaunted, for they knew that Jesus had overcome the world (John 16:33). Instead, they rejoiced *"that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name"* of Jesus (Acts 5:41). The next time, the Twelve went forth with the peace that comes through the forgiveness of sins. They went forth, *"clothed with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49), *"baptized with the Holy Spirit"* at Pentecost (Acts 1:5), Jesus' words being brought to their remembrance by the same Spirit (John 14:26).

The next time, the Twelve went forth, but they did not remain twelve only. They commissioned others: *"evangelists, ... pastors and teachers"* (Eph. 4:11), *"deacons"* (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:18-13), missionaries (Gal. 2:7-8), increasing the number laborers in the harvest fields, as we continue to do today.

We are blessed to here in Fort Wayne, and we at Zion are very blessed to see this prayer being answered year in and year out. We have laborers come here to be trained up and then sent forth into the harvest fields. We've sent forth Brennan DeForest and Abigail already this spring. Today we send forth Peter Wagner, Rebecca, and family. We'll be sending forth Patrick Jackson, Laura, and family on his vicarage soon — kind of like his first sending. In a couple of years, we hope to send him away as a pastor. We get to participate now in the training of Paul, whose presence among us with Courtney we get to enjoy. We rejoice for all of these and with them.

They go forth in faith, too, trusting that the Lord through His church will care for them. They, too, go forth with courage, to preach the Law, that we're not righteous but sinners, that as sons of Adam, we all sin and so all die, but also, to preach the Gospel that *"Christ died for the ungodly,"* that this is God's love for us ... *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,"* that by the death of Jesus,

God's Son, we are reconciled to God — no longer enemies but at peace — and that by His resurrection we have salvation and life. This message won't always be welcomed, but they know that this message is the thing of first importance that saves. They go forth filled with zeal from the Holy Spirit. He is needed as the weight of the Office of the Holy Ministry is placed upon them.

But even though we experience this activity, don't think that Jesus is wrong about the paucity of laborers. They are indeed fewer than what is necessary for the harvest fields. Seminaries are sending forth fewer pastors; churches remain vacant. New mission opportunities are left without a missionary. Our teachers' programs, too, are sending forth fewer commissioned teachers; the laborers are few; our Lutheran schools struggle to find teachers who know how to tell the good news of Jesus in addition to being able to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Nor is Jesus wrong about the harvest field. They remain plentiful, though the labor is more difficult than in the heyday of Christendom, when Christianity was the ascendant and favored religion. No, now disfavored and despised by many, it's more like the days when Jesus spoke these words. The harvest remains plentiful. Thus, we continue to pray: "O Lord, send out more laborers into Your harvest fields. Bless those whom You are sending. Lord, You promise to care for Your church. Your promise is faithful and true. We trust in You and in Your Word. We do not lose heart, for You build Your church, not we. We are Your humble servants. Use us according to Your will for the sake of those whom You have chosen unto salvation."

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.