

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Go and make disciples, we heard Jesus say last Sunday, and we welcomed a disciple, a follower of Jesus by Holy Baptism and His pupil, into our fellowship. Make disciples of all nations, said the One whose gracious will, with the Father, is that all people look to Him and be saved.

But let's give credit where credit is due: God Himself gives the growth. For who are we? We are dead people, born dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) because we are born of Adam according to the flesh. So we are born spiritually dead, and our flesh like the grass and its flower dies: *"the grass withers, and the flower falls"* (1 Pet. 1:24). And actually, it's even worse: we were born outside of God's kingdom, as God's enemies (Rom. 5:10).

Only God Himself can take confirmed enemies and reconcile them to Himself, which He does by His Son: for *"we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,"* we have been *"saved by his life,"* and now by His grace, *"we have ... received [that] reconciliation"* through faith: *"by grace you have been saved"* (Eph. 2:5). Yes, only God can take dead people and make them alive (Eph. 2:5); *"[it] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"*; it is *"not a result of [your] works"* (Eph. 2:8-9).

God is at work in our salvation. It was so for Israel of old as we were reminded in the Old Testament reading. The Lord Himself brought Israel out of Egypt, leading them through the Red Sea waters, making them thereby His *"treasured possession,"* *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* And it is so for the church today. It is the Lord's work, as the Psalmist says: He opens to us the gates of righteousness that we may enter through them; indeed, He is the gate — or perhaps the Door as we heard several weeks ago. He has answered us in our need and has become our salvation. He is the stone that the builders rejected that has become the cornerstone of the house the Lord has built (Ps. 118:19-23).

Of course, the Lord directs His people into disciple-making action: baptizing and teaching — and through these the Lord makes *"not a people"* into *"a people of His own possession,"* *"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation"* (1 Pet. 2:9). Not that any of us is anything but a servant, planting and watering, to be sure, but *"God ... gives the growth."* As St. Paul talks about himself and Apollos: *"we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building"* (1 Cor. 3:9).

St. Peter talked about us being built into a *"spiritual house"* of *"living stones"* (1 Pet. 2:5). And St. Paul, too, talked about the church as *"a holy temple in the Lord,"* and *"a dwelling place for God by the Spirit"* (Eph. 2:21-22). He wrote, *"you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone ..."* (Eph. 2:19-20). You are being built up into this house by the word

spoken to you by the apostles, that Gospel power of God. Which brings me to the Gospel itself.

For, although it is truly the Lord's work, yet He enlists His church into service in the task of planting and watering and building, so that here in this text we see Jesus sending out His apostles. And we might note that this is the only time in the Gospel of Matthew that the Twelve are called Apostles, although the verbal form of that word is used twice in our Gospel. Here in this text, we have the Twelve, Jesus' closest disciples, being sent, the Apostles being "apostled" out into the Lord's harvest fields, for that's what apostle means: "a sent one." Jesus "apostled" them — sent them out as His ambassadors, with His own authority, to do the things Jesus was doing. So even as Jesus was teaching and preaching the gospel and healing every disease and affliction, so Jesus gave the apostles authority to do the same things: He "*gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.*"

Jesus sent them out with instructions: for now just go to "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" "*Proclaim to them the message that I have been preaching,*" Jesus told them. Proclaim the nearness of the kingdom—it has come in Jesus. Proclaim the peace that Jesus came to bring—not an earthly peace, but peace with God—reconciliation in Christ, and the knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins (Luke 2). Proclaim it now to those who are near, He told them, but some day you will also proclaim it to those Gentiles who are far off (Eph. 2).

Jesus "apostled" the Apostles, sent them out reminding them that some would welcome them, but others would not; some would listen to them, but others would not. But He told them not to worry; those people who stop up their ears will receive justice for their rejection of God's men. Besides, remember: it is God who gives growth. Salvation, even faith, is the Lord's doing!

Jesus "apostled" the Twelve with warnings of persecution and arrests and floggings, but also with promises that even in the midst of those things, they would be afforded opportunities to bear witness. And He gave them instructions to "*be wise as serpents and innocent as doves,*" and promises that the Spirit would give them the words they need at the proper time.

Yes, on this occasion, Jesus was preparing the Apostles (all except for Judas) for their lifelong callings. This time He would be with them; this time they would return and report back; but there would come a time, when Jesus would return to the Father, and they would be sent out as witnesses to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. These Apostles would go to far-flung places proclaiming also to the Gentiles, some who were hostile to the message. And they would suffer "*for the name*" (Acts 5:41), even to the point of dying horrific deaths—all save one.

These Apostles endured to the end and have received their reward, but Jesus' sending has not come to an end. Here at Zion, we see it year in and year out. We are privileged to have men along with their families come to Zion and be a part of our family for a time. And we are privileged to play a small part in preparing these men (and women) for the Lord's work. But finally, they are sent out.

So it is for us again this year. Where are Jacob and Emily Hercamp? Sent off to Missouri. Where are René and Martha Castellero? Sent off to Wyoming. Where is Justin Massey? Sent off to Illinois. Where is David Walsh? Sent off to Minnesota. Where are David and Desi Casey-Motley? Well, actually, this week they're at Shepherd of the City for a confirmation, and they'll be here next week, but then they'll be gone...sent off to Maryland.

All of them are sent off, sent off to serve Christ's church, sent off as the descendants of the Apostles with the words of Jesus on their lips, the confession of His name as the Rock upon which He will build His church, with the foundational words of the Apostles and prophets on their lips. And not all will welcome them; not all will listen to their words, but they go, planting and watering, not for the sake of themselves that they may boast, but for the sake of a bountiful harvest. God Himself will give the growth.

It can be bittersweet for us—and for them, too. Let me share this from a letter we received: “[My wife] and I wanted to send you a letter to express our sincere thanksgiving for our time spent worshiping, singing, and receiving Christ's gifts at the altar as well as brotherhood. At first, we visited around the churches in Fort Wayne after I had completed my vicarage year ... For the most part, we are truly thankful for the opportunity to visit a few congregations, but we regret not attending Zion more from the beginning. [My wife] and I had said to each other that if I was not at seminary and had to leave to serve another congregation, then we would have made a home at Zion.” That commends you, brothers and sisters, for your hospitality.

But it is bittersweet. We're always sorry to see these families leave, but we give thanks to God for His sending: for by them He continues to build and preserve His church, built on Jesus the cornerstone, the Rock, using the foundational words of the apostles and prophets whom He sent out. Truly, God still gives growth through these whom He sends out today. By their baptizing and teaching, more disciples will be made; by their planting and watering, the church will grow, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her, for which we sing: *“Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!”* (Ps. 67:5—Introit).

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