April 7, 2019 Text: Matthew 10:1-15 “Call and Mission”

After listing the twelve disciples (Matthew 10:1-4), Matthew notes the instructions that Jesus gave them (Matthew 10:5-15). Remember that Matthew was writing primarily to a Jewish audience. He even starts his gospel by tracing Jesus in a genealogy that would be important to that Jewish heritage. So, it is not surprising that Matthew remembers Jesus telling the twelve “go nowhere near the Gentiles” and “go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). In one way of looking at it, Matthew wanted to make sure that his Jewish readers did not think they were off the hook; they would not be able to say “Oh, that Jesus fellow is for folks not like us; he must be for Gentiles and Samaritans.”

Of course, we know from other texts that Jesus did indeed come for all people—Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”, but in this week’s study verse our Lord is addressing one particular group of the family of God. The readers of Matthew would have been a little suspicious as to whether or not Jesus was for them because Matthew has listed the disciples, names that reflect a variety of cultural and language and locale backgrounds (Matthew 10:1-5).

Are we ever tempted to think that Jesus’ message and challenge is intended for someone else, so we don’t have to pay much attention? Laitly, do you think Jesus’ command to witness is aimed just at clergy? Clergy, do you think that Jesus’ instruction to care for children is targeted just for laity? In this week’s reminder from Matthew, Jesus is making sure that the Jews did not think that the Master’s mission was only for someone else. So, Matthew recalls Jesus’ mission for the twelve: make sure the Jews know the good news.

This gospel was probably written down about fifty years or so after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Matthew, as he writes, knows that many of the Jews refused to accept the saving work of Jesus, so it is not surprising that Matthew would remember something Jesus told the disciples about being rejected and ignored (Matthew 10:11-15). It happened to Jesus and it will happen to his followers. Even so, rejoice that there are some who will hear and accept. The translations often use the word “worthy” to describe the believers (Matthew 10:11-13). In the New Testament language, the word translated “worthy” comes from the root word that can mean “be open.” Plant the seed! The Lord will provide the harvest.

What Someone Else Has Said:
Arthur Core (Otterhin, Board of Publication, EUB), says of Otterhin: “…he believed that God calls the church to proclaim his Word, but evangelization without Christian nurture is only a partial fulfillment of the ministry of the gospel.”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, send me where You will...”

April 14, 2019 Text: Matthew 26:1-13 “Called to Remember”

There are a lot of places in this week’s assigned text where one might linger for a while. Why were the religious authorities afraid of the people (Matthew 26:5)? How did the disciples react to Jesus’ pronouncement that He would die in just a couple of days (Matthew 26:2)? What motivated the woman to perform this act of piety (Matthew 26:7)? Why did Jesus think that it was a beautiful thing to be prepared for burial (Matthew 26:12)? What passion did the disciples really have for the poor (Matthew 26:9)? Why did our Lord say the disciples would always have the poor among them (Matthew 26:11)? Why is it important to remember what the woman did (Matthew 26:13)?

But none of those is where I want to wander and wonder for a while. Look at Matthew 26:6. Notice where this meal took place. The home of Simon, the leper (Matthew 26:6). A leper! We can almost hear the cry of the leprous person who had to call out when walking down the street: “Unclean! Unclean!” so others could get out of the way and avoid contact (Leviticus 13:45). From the days of the Old Testament, leprosy was such a shock to the spiritual community that those so affected were to live apart from everyone else (Leviticus 13:46). But, here is Jesus at the home of a man who is so identified with the disease that “the leper” is part of the way he is recognized, “Simon the leper” (Matthew 26:6).

Students of the Bible often note that “leprosy” was a term used to describe a host of skin diseases, maybe not even like what the twenty-first century knows as leprosy. Whatever the condition was, it was enough to turn people away. Yet, here is Jesus and his disciples having a supper with someone society—particularly religious society—avoided.


What Someone Else Has Said:
In a book edited by M. Douglas Meeks (The Portion of the Poor, Kingswood Books), S.T Kimbrough has written this about John and Charles Wesley: “Certainly the involvement with the dispossessed prisoners and poor in the Colony of Georgia, the encounter with the horrors of slavery... and the disillusionment of the mission to Native Americans intensified the passion of the brothers for the outcasts of society.”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Put me with Jesus, Lord. I need to be where He would be, not just where I want to be...”

April 21, 2019 Text: Matthew 28:1-15 “Called to Proclaim the Resurrection”

What memories do you have of Easter?

I recall one year when it rained so hard that the family Easter egg hunt had to be in the house. One of the eggs was not found for a couple of months when my nostrils helped to locate it. ... Then there was the time at a very cold Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey, when the sunrise service was disrupted because the trumpet froze and “alleluia” sounded more like “vTvYP; "S...". Of course, I remember the time a colleague wanted the congregation to remember their baptism on Easter Sunday, so he tossed handfuls of water throughout the sanctuary, leading many to scream and scream as the water splashed on their brand-new Easter clothes. ... Ah, the memories!

Don’t you look forward to hearing those early followers of Jesus talk about their Easter memories? Mary Magdalene will probably say to the other Mary, “I’ll never forget that look on your face when the angel said Jesus was not in the tomb.” (Matthew 28:1-6). Then, just as they rushed off to tell the disciples what had happened, suddenly Jesus Himself appeared and said, in effect, “Howdy” (Matthew 28:9). I don’t want to be sacrilegious, but do you suppose at least one of the two needed to change clothes after that? Or, I bet the chief priests had a different kind of memory. “I thought we had this thing headed off at the pass, but I guess we just wasted our money. Look at all his followers now!” (Matthew 28:11-15) What do you think the soldiers who had guards the tomb recalled? “I remember getting all that cool cash, but I spent it all on a new wagon. It didn’t last long... and I never did quite understand what happened that day” (Matthew 28:12, 15).

I’m about ready to agree with that soldier: “I never did quite understand what happened that day.” Nevertheless, thanks be to God, accepting the
April 28, 2019

Text: Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:6-8 “Call and Commissioning”

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truth of the resurrection is not dependent on understanding it. Those
early disciples saw the risen Lord. The early Church, through the gift
of the Holy Spirit, found Jesus’ presence real and alive. And for genera-
tions yet to this day, the Risen One continues to break into our midst, to
rescue, to save, and to send forth. Now, that ought to make for a good
Easter memory!

What Someone Else Has Said:
In Faith for Personal Crises (Scribners), Carl Mishalson said: “The
Christian doctrine of the resurrection is not a cosmological fantasy
about the detailed conditions of an after life. It is the significant assur-
ance that death does not put an end to the possibility of life.”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Risen Lord, thank
You for Your presence with us even now…”

April 28, 2019

Text: Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:6-8 “Call and Commissioning”

There are days when I wish the Easter story had ended on that Sunday
morning long ago in Jerusalem. That’s a nice happy ending. But then
comes the clincher. After the disciples encounter the Risen Lord and
celebrate this remarkable victory over death (Matthew 28:17), Jesus
lays out the next step: “Go therefore and make disciples…” (Matthew
28:19).

And then a little later, Jesus appears to them again, and just as soon as
He has told them that they will receive power from the Holy Spirit, He
gives them “the rest of the story”: “You will be my witnesses” (Acts
1:8).

Suddenly, the Easter story is not just about Jesus. It includes us. Di-
ciple-makers. Witnesses. I was doing better when all I had to do was
applaud the resurrection. It is as if I am watching a video on my cell
phone—great movie—and then that little red light starts blinking to let
me know that I have a message. Guess what, disciples; the message is
from the resurrected Christ. He wants us to enjoy the movie—to cel-
brate Easter—but then He has a message for us: tell others, be a wit-
ness by the way you live, bring others into the baptized family.

Perhaps I don’t feel capable of this task to which Jesus has called me.
Perhaps my faith is too weak. Perhaps my gifts are too limited. Sor-
ry—Jesus beat me to the punch on that one. Did you notice who was
present when Jesus gave this instruction? Look at Matthew 28:17:

...some doubted.” But that mixed bag of followers, some of whom
even doubted, are precisely the ones to whom Jesus turned and said
“Go, make disciples…” There is no hiding place even with frailty of
belief.

Jesus! Didn’t you notice that now there are eleven disciples, not
twelve? Jesus! Didn’t you notice that some of your followers doubt-
ed they were really seeing you? Jesus! Don’t you realize how tough
things are now in the twenty-first century?

But there is good news. We are not doing this on our own. Jesus is
with us (Matthew 28:20). There will be power from the Holy Spirit
(Acts 1:8). Those are promises that make me glad that the Easter story
did not end on that Sunday morning. It is still alive today!

What Someone Else Has Said:
The New Catholic Answer Bible (Fireside Publishing) states: “Ac-
cording to Scripture, then, the gospel is what the Church has always
preached: a proclamation of the life, death, resurrection, and ascen-
sion of Jesus Christ, which calls for our response of repentance, bap-
tism, and a life of obedience to God.”

Prayer:
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Here I am, Lord...

Easter says you can put truth in
a grave, but it won't stay there.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

~Quote: Clarence W. Hall

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women
took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They
found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While
they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright
the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the
dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be
delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered his words.

Luke 24 New International Version