

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year A, Proper 8: Isaiah 2:10–17; Psalm 89:1–8; Romans 6:3–11; Matthew 10:34–42*

The first of five sermons Jesus gives in Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount. Today’s gospel lesson is the conclusion of the second, the Mission Sermon. It begins with these words, “And [Jesus] called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity.”¹ He named the twelve “apostles”—“messengers”—and charged them to take up his mission, “proclaim ‘that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.’ ”² They are to heal as he heals, to raise the dead as he raises the dead, to cleanse lepers as he cleanses lepers, and to cast out demons, as he casts out demons.

Last Sunday we heard the middle part of this sermon to his disciples, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”³ Jesus spoke of the “future sufferings” of his apostles and of others, his disciples. He warns them to be faithful. It concluded with these

¹ Matthew 10:1.

² Matthew 10:7.

³ Matthew 10:16.

words, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men and women, I will acknowledge him or her before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men and women, I also will deny him or her before my Father who is in heaven.”⁴

And so we come this morning to the conclusion of the Mission Sermon. Taken as a whole, it names the twelve disciples who are the first disciples to be set aside from others as apostles—in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, but not John. Others will join them in this role in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles⁵ and in Paul’s Letter to the Romans.⁶ The Mission Sermon also mentions prophets, righteous persons, disciples, and “little ones”—quite possibly a way of referring to the Christian community, God’s children, God’s “little ones.”⁷

I want to say something about these words, “He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of

⁴ Matthew 10:32–33. My translation based on Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 149.

⁵ Acts 13:2.

⁶ Romans 16:7: “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.”

⁷ See Mark 9:42. Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Bible 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 688–89.

me . . . He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me.”⁸

To seek to follow God’s commands for our lives is fundamental in Matthew’s gospel. You and I are called to follow Christ, to obey the commands of God as we are given grace to do. We are called to a life of relationships with others. To do what is right and to suffer for righteousness sake.

Paul’s words in the First Letter to the Corinthians remind us of the breadth of the gifts that God gives to people: “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . there are varieties of service, but the same Lord . . . there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.”⁹

Matthew’s Jesus does not always seem to me to be a gentle Jesus, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I usually give only Luke credit for the words about the joy of a shepherd who leaves the flock to find one who is lost. But Matthew also uses this story about the lost: “And if he finds [the sheep], truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more

⁸ Matthew 10:38, 40.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:4–6.

than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.”¹⁰ Being found once by Jesus Christ doesn’t mean we won’t be lost again. Jesus concludes his story of the found sheep in Matthew with these words, “It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”¹¹

Now, Jesus’ words to those who follow him, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me, receives the one who sent me.”¹² Ulrich Luz writes of these words, “If the sending of the disciples goes back to Jesus, we cannot exclude the possibility of the same for [these words].”¹³ And at the end of Matthew, “Behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”¹⁴ With great respect, I would add Luke and, to a greater extent, John carry this message.

In Luke, Jesus says, “He who hears you, hears me.”¹⁵ In John, this theme is fundamental to John’s narrative of the supper before the Passover. One short quotation: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives

¹⁰ Matthew 18:12–14; Luke 15:3–7.

¹¹ Matthew 18:14.

¹² Matthew 10:40.

¹³ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 120.

¹⁴ Matthew 28:20b.

¹⁵ Luke 10:16.

any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me.”¹⁶ I think we can say with confidence that Jesus sent out disciples.

In three days, we expect this church to reopen. I wrote about it in the newsletter last week; there will be more in *The Angelus* for this week that will go out today. Let me say that our schedule will change when the church opens on Wednesday. We plan to be open from 11:00 AM until 2:00 PM, Monday through Saturday. The daily Mass will be at the high altar at 12:10 PM. The Sunday Mass will be at 11:00 AM.

I regret that we will need to bring the daily live-stream of the Eucharist to an end for the moment. We will continue to live-stream the Masses on Sundays and Prayer Book Holy Days. The primary reason for this is the current size of our clergy staff. During the eight-day period beginning on June 21 and ending on June 28, Father Jay Smith preached three weekday sermons and one sermon on Sunday, and I did the same. This has been our, in many ways happy, task since Father Jim Pace moved to Georgia on May 15 to take up his new position at Valdosta State University. However, neither Jay nor I feel comfortable preaching at a live-

¹⁶ John 13:20.

streamed and recorded service without using a written manuscript and this has meant spending much more time in sermon preparation than before the shutdown. With reopening, we expect that we will need to give our attention to some significant pastoral, educational, and administrative issues and duties. We need to try to balance the workload. That said, our team is actively exploring new equipment for live-streaming at the high altar. We think we can live-stream with our present equipment from the high altar on Sunday, July 5—at least that's the plan today. We are receiving proposals for equipment that will give us a high-quality presence online. This ministry will continue. For your financial support and for your prayers, the clergy and lay leaders of the parish are deeply thankful.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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