

Wednesday in the Seventh Week after Pentecost

July 7, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 1, Proper 9: Genesis 41:55–57; 42:5–7a, 17–24a, 18–22; Psalm 33:1–4;
Matthew 10:1–7*

Today we hear the beginning of the tenth chapter of Matthew. This chapter is one of the five sermons Matthew’s Jesus gives in this gospel. We will hear all of it at the Daily Eucharist beginning today through next Monday.

Jesus begins by giving the twelve disciples the power to cast out unclean spirits and heal—his power. Matthew and Luke draw their list of disciples from Mark.¹ There are minor variations. Note that the number twelve is significant in the emerging Christian community. Later in this gospel, Jesus will say to the twelve apostles, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”²

Two Sundays ago, we started reading the First Book of Samuel as our first reading at Daily Morning Prayer. Last week, Saul went from being the Lord’s chosen and anointed king to being told his kingship and that of his sons would be at an end. Saul did not obey the instructions of God in a battle against the Philistines.³

Then God sent Samuel to anoint the youngest son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite of the tribe of Judah, David.

In his commentary on Matthew, the late Daniel Harrington, a Jesuit priest and scholar, wrote, “Ancient Israel understood itself to be a confederation of twelve tribes descended from Jacob [whom God renamed] Israel and his wives (Leah and Rachel) and concubines [Zilpah and Bilhah] . . . Even after the twelve-tribe structure ceased to carry political meaning, people

¹ Mark 3:13–19a; Matthew 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16.

² Matthew 19:28.

³ 1 Samuel 13:7b–15a.

remained aware of their ancestry.”⁴ The purpose of the disciples’ mission is to bring Good News to the children the descendants of Jacob. The goal is a “restored Israel.”⁵

In centuries to come, baptism for Christians was rebirth by water and the Spirit and something of a crossing of the Red Sea on dry land. Paul wrote to the Galatians about the new Israel: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.”⁶

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, the risen Jesus appears many times to the eleven in Jerusalem over a period of forty days. Finally, on the fortieth day, the apostles ask, “ ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know . . . But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.’ ”⁷ For us, the four gospels are witnesses of a New Israel, those who follow Jesus Christ and believe in “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”⁸

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

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⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 138.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 138–39.

⁶ Galatians 6:15–16.

⁷ Acts 1:6–8.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 359.