



MISSION SUNDAY (MISSION WORK AT HOME)

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, July 8, 2012

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Lection – Matthew 10:5, 7-15 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 5) [The] twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, . . . (v. 7) As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of God has come near.’ (v. 8) Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. (v. 9) Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, (v. 10) no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. (v. 11) Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. (v. 12) As you enter the house, greet it. (v. 13) If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. (v. 14) If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. (v. 15) Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Mission Sunday (Mission Work at Home) is the moment on our liturgical calendar when the church takes the time to focus on our responsibility to not only spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and build the Christian community, but also to actively engage in the liberation and healing of people. Liberating, healing, mission work, and the black church go hand-in-hand. Since its inception the black church has been a place where people of African descent could experience healing for their mind, body, and spirit because the church fought for social justice, equality, development of black organizations and schools, and the instilling of dignity and pride in those it served.

Mission Sunday (Mission Work at Home) invites the church community to be participants in Christ's work by being prophetic living representatives of God, not only in word but also in deed. It is the day on which believers are reminded that they have equal footing at the cross and that we must band together as people of faith to serve God's people by speaking truth to power, dismantling systems of inequality, eradicating poverty, reaching and teaching the brothers in the hood, and empowering the sisters in the wilderness via holistic mission work. Mission Sunday is the day that we are challenged to understand that our vertical relationship with God demands that we reach out horizontally to provide healing to those who are left out and who our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, called the "least of these."

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Matthew 10:5, 7-15

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

Growing up as a preacher's kid in the Baptist church, my father would always impress upon the members the importance of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ beyond the four walls of the Church and doing missions via providing ministry that met people where they were. When we celebrated Missionary Sunday my father sought to teach us that missions was a condition of being Christian. It wasn't something that we were to do on special Sundays; it was to be a lifestyle. As a result, our church sought to embody mission as we fed the hungry, prayed with people on street corners, offered resources and knowledge for daily living, supported overseas missions in places like Haiti, and sought to help individuals experience authentic healing in their lives. The teachings of my childhood and my exposure to missions throughout my life have solidified my belief that it is critical that the black church always be mission-minded.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

The Gospel of Matthew is the Gospel of the church.¹ Not only is it the only Gospel to use the term "church," *ekklesia* (16:18; 18:17), but also both its content and structure indicate an interest in providing clear and coherent guidance to a community of believers.² A Gospel written by a Jew to Jews oppressed and dominated by the Roman empire, Matthew allows us to bear witness to Jesus, the personification of the Torah or fulfillment

of Old Testament prophecies, putting forth the mission statement to drive the disciples' ministry.

Matthew 10:5 opens with the commissioning of the disciples. The word used in the Greek for commanding the twelve disciples or giving them instructions comes from the word *paragellein*. This word in Greek has four different meanings: 1. a military command; 2. summoning one's friends to help; 3. a teacher giving students an assignment; and, 4. an Imperial king giving orders for ambassadors to dispatch into the world and represent him.

As he sends them out, Jesus begins by forbidding the Twelve to go to the Gentiles and the Samaritans (verse 5). The intention of these instructions was not to create an exclusive gospel, but to limit and focus their ministry and service to the Galilean community; the disciples were not yet equipped to preach to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans. Besides, where else would mission work begin but at home? However, as the Gospel later shows, the instruction not to go to the Gentiles and Samaritans was a temporary command. Jesus wisely sought to concentrate their service and spreading of the gospel in the Galilean community to later achieve a universal victory that would include all people.

Jesus then informs the disciples that they have words to say and works to do as his disciples:

Words

The disciples were challenged to proclaim good news—the Kingdom of God is near (v. 7). That is, they were to explain that evident in the life of Jesus Christ was the Kingdom. They were to make clear that in Jesus Christ there was salvation, healing, and abundant life; a new world order was now possible for those oppressed emotionally, politically, physically, socially, and spiritually.

Works

In as much as the commissioned disciples were challenged to proclaim and talk about the Kingdom, their ministry was not confined to words. They were expected at the same time to do Kingdom work. They were to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons (v. 8), as such acts are exemplars of the change that occurs in humanity when the body of Christ does its work because of Christ with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The twelve are to become the hands and feet of Christ on earth. The power Christ exercised he transfers to them. The significance of this for the disciples was that it laid clearly before them their work as disciples. It meant that they had a responsibility to heal the sick just as Jesus came to bring health and healing to the world. Jesus empowers the disciples to cure the sick (*asthenein*) in the Greek, which means weak. That is to say that the disciples were instructed to strengthen the weak places and give power to the faint. They were also told to raise the dead—to resurrect those who found themselves hopeless and helpless due to the grip of sin and oppression upon them. The command to cleanse lepers was not focused just on persons who has leprosy, but on those whose minds, bodies, and spirits had been polluted, as life in Jesus can purify. Finally, they were to cast out demons from those who had lost control of their lives or were dominated by evil

spirits or thoughts. Jesus definitively sends the disciples on a mission of healing which begins with their community.

Concerns

Mission work involves Divine-centered deeds. Thus, Jesus reminds the disciples they must be humble and not overly concerned about material things, finances, and hoarding resources. Mission work will never succeed if mission workers wait until they have everything they need to do the work. This command of Christ stands as a reminder in a time where the needs of the poor and oppressed are plentiful and the resources of mission workers are few. Christ tells them “to take no gold, silver or copper in their belts (v. 9), no bag for their journey, or two tunics or staff” (v. 10). He simply instructs the disciples as rabbis were instructed, to treat the world as if it is a temple of God, and to not serve with the intent of receiving something in return for their service. However, he also says that those who receive services should not negate their duty and are to provide reasonable support to those who concentrate their work on the affairs of God.

Conduct

Finally, Jesus provides practical advice for the Twelve as he prepares to send them on their assigned mission. He encourages them to be courteous as they enter into houses by offering greetings (v. 12). He also makes clear that some homes will be receptive and others will reject them. In those that are receptive, Jesus invites the disciples to let their peace abide in those homes (v. 13). However, if the disciples are rejected, they are to simply retain their peace, shake the dust off their feet, and leave (v. 14). Here Jesus makes clear that the disciples are to conduct themselves as peacefully as possible and not be surprised or deterred by instances of rejection. There is too much at stake to expend energy in unwelcoming places, especially since there are so many souls who await healing.

As disciples or students of the Christ, we represent him. Through the commissioning of the Twelve, we are reminded that our call is to commit ourselves to being healing missionaries. Yes, proclaim the good news—the Kingdom of God is near. As St. Francis of Assisi said, “We are to preach the gospel at all times; and use words if necessary.” In other words, yes we are to proclaim the Good News, but it is through our deeds that those in our communities will know that we are healing missionaries who come in the name of Christ and in the might of his power. The ailments on the healing list may be called by different names today: HIV/AIDS, cancer, greed, mental illness, addiction, low self-esteem, hubris, etc. But the work is still the same: go as missionaries and cure the sick; raise the dead—the walking dead due to so many cultural-killing ailments; cleanse today’s lepers—those cast out due to illnesses and conditions that are beyond their control; and cast out demons—the demons of violence, the demons of poverty, and the demons of oppression. The work is still the same. We may be rejected and we cannot count on always-ready resources, but the Ultimate Healer just said, “Go.”

Celebration

There is much to celebrate as we move out to do mission work at home for the Master. We celebrate because our Master equips us with what we need and he abides with us. But not only does the Divine equip us and abide with us, He sends us the Holy Spirit so that we can tear down strongholds. I believe we can snatch someone back who is standing on the precipice of suicide; I believe we can pull someone out of poverty; I believe we can bring Good News to the oppressed. I believe that he who has begun a good work in us will complete it. We know our mission; our community is counting on us. Ready, set, go!

Descriptive Details

Descriptive details of this passage include:

Sights: Lepers with oozing sores waiting for healing; a dusty entryway into a house entered by the disciples; oppressed women;

Sounds: The bold, commanding voice of Jesus; the sounds of those who are sick or demon-possessed; the coughing of a sick woman; tears from those in pain; outbursts from those who are mentally ill and demon-possessed; voices speaking out to reject help; the sounds of persons applauding those bringing aid; and

Smells: The smell of a dead boy in the street due to gun violence; the smell of food being carried to a homeless shelter; and the smell of fresh paint on a new home built for a poor family.

III. Possible Sermon Titles

1. On a Mission for the Master
2. Ready, Set, Go!

IV. References

McMickle, Marvin. Where Have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America: Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

Cone, James H. A Black Theology of Liberation. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1986, 1990.

Notes

1. Johnson, Luke Timothy. The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999. p. 187.
2. Ibid.