

# **Standing With The Few**

**Psalm 63**

**Matthew 9:35 – 10:1, 6 – 8**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

**Sunday, June 19, 2017**

When you heard this morning's gospel reading, you probably realized it's Gene Peterson's interpretation of the same scripture we use as the benediction every Sunday:

"Go out to the lost confused people in your neighborhood and tell them the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick, raise the dead, touch the untouchables and kick out demons..."

You might say this was the Church's first mission statement.

Jesus was certainly a man on a mission, going from village to village to assure the downtrodden God's kingdom is nearer than they thought. Becoming a brother and friend to these forgotten members of society, Jesus rejuvenated their core identities as God's beloved children.

Always backing up his words with actions, whenever Jesus showed up, these "harassed and helpless people," as Matthew called them were given the privilege of being the very first to get a preview of what to expect when God's kingdom comes down to earth.

Up to this point in his ministry, Jesus did all the teaching and healing while his disciples sat back to listen and watch.

Then suddenly and unexpectedly, Jesus took them aside and basically said, "Now, it's your turn." He gave them precise instructions before sending them out. For the first time they'd be healing the sick, raising the dead, touching the untouchables and casting out demons on their own.

These were the four instructions Jesus gave them:

First, heal the sick. Healing comes in many forms. Doctors and nurses heal the body but everyone is capable of helping the healing process along through our prayers, compassion and support. Visiting the sick is one of the disciple's primary callings.

Second, raise the dead. There are people out there alive in the flesh but dead in the spirit. They either never learned how to lead meaningful lives or they experienced a trauma arresting their emotional and spiritual development. The disciples were tasked with raising them up to the new life God intended them to enjoy.

Third, cleanse the lepers. Until recently, lepers were believed to be highly contagious. They were "the untouchables." Now we know better but we're still just as afraid of today's untouchables. Counted among them are the mentally ill, the chronically poor and more recently immigrants, including the illegal aliens. Jesus told his

disciples they had an obligation to befriend and help these untouchables. That same obligation still stands today.

Fourth but not least, cast out demons. Don't worry, we're not necessarily talking about practicing exorcisms but we are instructed to be agents of liberation to people enslaved by anger and hatred, alcohol and drugs, greed and lust and anything else that defiles their humanity. The disciples were handed the responsibility of befriending and assuring these people that God is ready to save them from their hell on earth, if and when they're ready to trust God and let their demons go.

I can imagine the disciples getting nervous when Jesus cut the apron strings and sent them off by themselves. Up until now, it was safe and easy being just another nameless face in the crowd. After this, they were expected to step out from the crowd and take center stage.

Knowing them being put on the front lines, they had to realize if Jesus was given grief by the scribes and Pharisees for doing and saying things, they'd be attacked for the same reason.

Discipleship was no longer a free ride. Before, all they had to do was follow, watch and listen. Now it would get dicey. They'd be tested every time they opened their mouths. The time for hiding in the crowd was over.

Now they had to stand up in front with Jesus.

I've used this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer before, "When Christ calls you, he bids you to come with him and die."

Chances are miniscule any of us would ever be crucified literally but if you step out from your comfort zones you could be crucified figuratively. Sooner or later someone isn't going to like what you're saying or doing. You could lose your friends and upset your family. You could be called a troublemaker.

History and current events show whenever people of good will take a stand and fight for God's justice and peace, the world system circles the wagons.

You know the usual suspects. The political and religious establishments joined forces whenever the prophets and later Jesus trespassed on their turf to challenge their monopoly of power and wealth.

In the twenty centuries that followed, countless men and women stepped out from the crowd to offer an alternative to the world system: A kingdom based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. They were put down but their faith inspired others to take up their cause to make the world a better place than they found it.

Every generation fights the same fight all over again because in every generation the world system regroups to fight back.

But let's stop talking in generalities and start talking specifically about us and the world system we find ourselves in. Compared with past generations, we have it pretty good. Living in a

constitutional republic with guaranteed rights, we can make our opinions and discontent known to our elected leaders.

Recently, the polls show most of us are disgusted with politicians on both sides of the aisle. The assassination attempt last week stunned everyone in Washington. Finally, everyone is calling for the restoration of civility but how long will it last? Unfortunately, not very long. Soon it will be back to “gotcha” politics as usual instead of working together for the common good.

In the meantime, people are hurting financially, emotionally and spiritually because our elected leaders are obsessed with undermining each other.

Isn't this a stunning example of the recurring “the more things change the more things stay the same” syndrome? When Rome ruled the world, the people at the bottom suffered because the people at the top were constantly competing for power. I'm not suggesting conditions are as bad as then. I am saying our leaders should stop and learn from these past mistakes.

One of our God given responsibilities is to help our leaders learn from these mistakes by sending them a clear message. Write letters, make phone calls and sign petitions, get involved.

But a word of warning, don't be surprised if other Christians, living the best they can according to the Sermon on the Mount share your frustrations but offer different solutions than yours. That's when it really gets frustrating. People of good will coming from different experiences and perspectives tend to makes things messier.

Isaiah advised, “Come now, let us reason together.” (Isaiah 1:18) Coming together in good faith to work out our differences usually leads to finding common ground on some things and permission to disagree on others.

Coming together to reason together can bring about a stunning revelation: Despite our differences, in the end God, not us has the last word.

Having said all this, let's get back to Matthew's story of Jesus sending out his disciples on their first trial run and how it speaks to us.

As the disciples watched Jesus teaching and healing, they also heard him say, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37)

Did the disciples realize Jesus was talking about them? Do you realize Jesus is talking about you?

We get nervous when we sense Jesus cutting the aprons strings before sending us out to heal the sick, raise the dead, touch the untouchables and kick out demons. We'd rather remain anonymous and stay behind. Unless you're an attention grabber, you don't like stepping out from the crowd to do things you've never done before.

That's when The Holy Spirit shows up with the assurance God gave you a special identity and the necessary gifts and talents to be one of the few. But doesn't hearing you're one of the few only make things worse? You'd feel much better knowing you're one of the majority. If you don't show up, someone else will take your place. There's a false security in numbers.

True security comes from trusting that even if you alone show up, God is with you. That makes all the difference. When God's all you got, God's all you need. So the question is will you show up to be one of the few?

Never forget, the sick need your healing presence. The Untouchables need your loving touch. The walking dead need you to raise them to new life. Demons need to be kicked out of individuals and systems by you! That's what disciples are supposed to do. That's your calling in life, to be agents of God's grace.

Just like you, the lost and confused have needs to be met. Unlike you they haven't met Jesus. If you don't get up from your pew and go out to introduce them to Jesus, who will? The harvest is plentiful; the laborers are few.

The more God makes you aware of the many people living around this church, the more your commitment to Christ is being put on the line. We can't pretend they're not out there. They need you because God put you here. To be needed.

When Jesus took out the scissors, the disciples were forced to decide to either play it safe or make the required sacrifice of their time and security to help God bring heaven to earth.

To their credit, they became the first of the few.

God expected great things from them. Two thousand years later, God expects great things from you.

Don't be afraid when I say that. God never expects anything from you beyond your capabilities. Neither will God ever let you get in over your head. God has a good track record we can count on. God stands ready to prepare your way and God always give you the right words. All you have to do is show up.

During the Battle of Britain, referencing the brave pilots of the RAF, Churchill told the House of Commons, "Never before in the history of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Perhaps if Churchill remembered what the apostles accomplished, he'd have toned down his rhetoric because he knew we owe a great debt of gratitude to the few who were faithful to Christ in every generation.

Now it's our turn to be numbered among the few. The question is when God calls your name, asking you to do something important for Christ and his kingdom will you stand out from the crowd to join the few?

Let us pray.