

# Sermon

Matthew 9:35-10:23

2 Pentecost A • Sunday, June 14, 2020

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Coos Bay, Oregon

What if they don't like me?

What if they won't talk with me?

What if they tell me to leave?

I don't like always having to go into unfamiliar, unwelcoming new places –

That's why I got out of sales!

Well, not really,

But I was reminded of my former career in sales as I was studying this text this week, reading about Jesus' charge to the disciples. In sales, at least in newspaper advertising, each salesperson generally had an assigned geographic territory, in which they service and maintain the current, active accounts. You get to meet a lot of nice, friendly people, establish rapport with them and then visit them every week or so. That's the fun part.

The not-so-fun part is knowing that you always have to keep doing more, that, like it or not, you can't just rely on the base you already have accumulated, you have to keep making more and more contacts, ever increasing business. That's where cold-calling comes in. Making a cold call is approaching business people who haven't ever used your services, and furthermore, who have **never, ever indicated** that they are **even slightly interested**, or even **care** about your services. Your job is to win them over, to convince them of their need to give some of their money, okay, **a LOT of their money**, to you. It's hard work.

This phenomenon isn't unique to sales, every teacher must feel the same way each fall when facing a new classroom full of unfamiliar students – and it's awkward until you've established a rapport with each other. It's the same way every time you begin a new job, move to a new neighborhood or start attending to a new school or a new church.

So, like many of you, I can relate to the disciples in today's gospel.

The disciples' mission is not something they volunteered for – rather, they were chosen, authorized and sent by God through Christ. One of my pastors at my home church liked to remind us that "Jesus never asked for volunteers" – he always asked them to perform a specific job.

Jesus sends out the 12, the larger group of followers **and us, of course** - we are called, chosen at our baptism to face a great world need and to minister our neighbors with compassion.

Here Jesus send the disciples to "the lost sheep" of Israel only – which, to me, sounds kinda unlike Jesus – but one of the Biblical commentaries suggested that the disciples would have been reluctant to approach, or cold-call, the Gentiles anyway. Being Jews, they wouldn't have known how to connect with them – what demographics or promotions they would have bought.

They wouldn't have known what to say.

Of course, after Easter, Jesus' Great Commission ends this restriction when he tells them to go out to all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But today, as it was in the First Century, there still is a plentiful harvest right in our own backyard.

Although most of us haven't been sent to be missionaries to foreign lands to proclaim the gospel in words and deeds, we can be aware that the harvest **also** is right here among our own people. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Church*, uses today's particular gospel text when he says, "The practice of targeting specific kinds of people for evangelism is a biblical principle for ministry." Actually, the idea of a target market is familiar to anyone who has ever worked in sales or marketing, so why can't those principals be useful in evangelism?

Oh, and let's unpack this word. It comes from the Greek, and before your eyes glaze over, it actually means "good news teller." It's where we get the word angel (look, it's right there in the middle of the word.) An angel is one who tells the good news about Jesus. From the moment of our baptisms, that is what we are commanded to do, as well.

Rick Warren goes on to say "Too many congregations are naive in their thinking about evangelism. If you ask, "Who is your church trying to reach for Christ?" the response will likely be, "Everybody! We're trying to reach the entire world for Jesus Christ." Of course this is the goal of the Great Commission, and it should be the prayer of every church, but not even a church like ours that is moving to become a church of disciples can reach everyone.

For the Lutheran church, any church, for that matter, to be effective in evangelism we must decide on a person or persons to target. We need to discover what types of people live in our area, decide which of those groups our church is best equipped to reach, and then devise which styles of outreach best match our targets. One of the best examples in my church experience was a

member of my internship church in Eugene. This mother of small children reaches out to other families with young children and invites them to come to the Wednesday meal and to sing with the children's choir after dinner.

While our church will never reach everyone, our strategies must be especially suited to reaching certain *types* of people. Knowing who we're trying to reach makes evangelism much easier. Rick Warren believes that the most effective evangelistic strategy is to first try to reach those with whom we already have something in common. After we've discovered all the possible target groups in our community, we might ask which group should we focus on first?

**The answer is to go after those we are most likely to reach.**

**In sales, this is known as reaching for low-hanging fruit.**

Who could that be in your life? We all have Christian friends who talk about what God means to them but we know they don't attend any church. If we don't invite them to worship with us, who will? If we aren't able to talk about our faith with other church members, our those in our own families, it is unlikely that we will be comfortable talking about our faith to unchurched friends or strangers. If we can't talk about what Jesus means to me, in my life, who will?

The disciples' witness and work begins with their own people.

***So should ours.***

It should be a starting point, we just have to be careful not to let it *stop* there!

If the disciples did things to indicate who they were, we might ask **ourselves, by what signs are WE distinguished as Christian missionaries in our communities?**

(As a side note, I've heard that the men's dept. at the WalMart in Salt Lake City sells more white shirts than any other store in the chain!) Should we always wear a cross or fish pin? Do we need something besides our "Christian conduct" to distinguish us from the rest of society?

Jesus tells the disciples not to worry about what they will say, that the Holy Spirit will speak through them. Have you ever been in a situation where you were trying to get people organized to form some sort of church presentation only to have them tell you they wanted to let "the Spirit give them words to speak," -- which really meant that they didn't want to think much about or write down what they might say? It's frustrating, isn't it?

However, the only situations in scriptures in which this promise is given is when the believers are likely to be arrested and must stand before the authorities.

When you read Steven's testimony before the authorities in Acts, you KNOW *he* was guided by the spirit.

But I'm not sure Jesus' promise applies to those leading a worship service or preaching a sermon..

(I heard a story once, though it's probably not true, of a preacher who got into the pulpit with nothing prepared. He prayed for a message from God -- that the Spirit would speak through him.

The message he heard was, "You're lazy.")

It may have been that before talking with the Gentiles, the Spirit needed to give the disciples the right words to connect with them because quoting the Hebrew scriptures meant absolutely nothing to the Gentiles.

In a similar way today, if we were to go around saying, "The Bible says ...." It would turn off the very people we were trying to reach - people who don't believe the Bible has any authority over their lives or understand that the Bible is the Word of God.

But even after conscientious preparation, we may still need to be open to let the Spirit give us new words in such situations.

There have been times when visiting with someone in the hospital, that I know God had given me the words to speak. Thoughts and phrases came out of nowhere into my head and it seemed that they were exactly what was needed by the other person.

(Of course, there have also been many other times when I seemed only to say the wrong things. The Spirit blows where it will and I certainly can't control it.)

If our message to others is that they need to put their security in God rather than any other things, then we deny that message if we are relying on a prepared speech as our security blanket in presenting our witness to them. We deny the message that we trust God if we are worried about what we might say. Our actions DO speak louder than our words. The witness to the world out there requires us to trust God for our words.

So my suggestion, clear as muddy water might be is... prepare, but be open to the Spirit taking you in directions you might not have thought of...

As we prepare for what may come, we must remind ourselves that while our risen Lord sends us into the encounter with hostility or even the merely apathetic, we are never alone. Jesus will never leave our side. As we seek to grow in Christ, perhaps we will begin to see clearly that we are surrounded by so many "lost sheep". The plentiful harvest is in our own backyards.

God answers our prayers for more workers with, "You go"  
Or, if you will, cold call...cold call...cold call...

Amen.