



***Eleventh Sunday Ordinary Time 2005***

***Exodus 19: 2-6 Romans 5: 6-11 Matthew 9: 35- 10: 8***

The section from Matthew's Gospel for today acts as a bridge between a series of healing stories that show Jesus in his ministry, and the missioning of the disciples to share his authority.

Jesus moved around the towns and villages. He taught, he proclaimed the Good News, he healed. This was the essence of his ministry.

Matthew then tells us, about the motive or driving force behind Jesus' ministry. When Jesus looked at people he saw pain. The image used is very powerful; the people were like sheep, leaderless, prostrate from exhaustion, harassed and scattered. The prophets had used these same images to describe the people of God in exile.

The focus of Jesus' ministry, were people who were at the end of their tether; those who had no hope. Jesus believed that his mission was to remind people that God loved them and that God's love was not conditional on their merits. Paul also repeated this message of God's love not being dependent on our worthiness.

The use of the harvest image for ministry has not always been helpful. We are inclined to see harvest in terms of profit. What Jesus was stressing was the enormity of the task of bringing help and comfort to so many. The people knew that a bumper harvest required the cooperation of many.

This becomes clearer when that Jesus asks for help. He had plenty of followers but he needed disciples. He needed people who saw what he saw and were prepared to do what he was doing. God, Lord of the harvest, commissions Jesus to act as agent of God by seeking out workers who will share in the divine mission of hope and healing.

Those who step forward to join in this mission are given a share in the authority of Jesus. Matthew ties this call to the memory of God's commitment to Israel as Deliverer. He uses the image of the twelve tribes to name the first workers. In the new covenant the workers will go out and form new peoples not based on birth but on commitment to the Gospel.

Matthew is the only evangelist to use the term apostle (one sent) for these workers. The apostles are arranged in six pairs, maybe to remind us of the need for companionship in the task of ministry or to refer to the Markan story of Jesus sending out the disciples two by two.

At this time in our history we have a similar situation. There are plenty of followers but few disciples. Some see their Baptism as nothing more than the entry

requirement for a religious group. Many are not aware that baptism is a public statement of the willingness to be actively involved in the mission of Jesus.

The formation of a group, by Jesus, is not about seeking members for the sake of personal salvation but to provide a training school for disciples, real other Christs.

The list of apostles shows us that willingness is a chief requirement. If we are willing to join Jesus' call for assistance, Jesus will share his authority with us.

Jesu prepared his disciples through teaching, prayer and practice. The same means are available to us. We can participate according to our gifts.

“The gift you have received, give as gift!”

Patricia Stevenson rsj.