

The theme for our morning's meditation is, "God himself commissions those who do his work." One of the things that we see in scripture is that the harvest is plenty and the workers are few. We are therefore asked to pray to the Lord of the harvest so that he would raise up more workers for his work. Jesus in his ministry went through all the towns and villages of Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God. Large crowds followed him and they were like harassed and helpless sheep without a shepherd. This morning we will be meditating on the passage from Matthew's gospel where Jesus commissions his disciples.

Jesus called the twelve disciples and empowered them as he gave them authority to heal every disease and sickness and to drive out demons. All this was possible because the disciples were called to be with him (Mark 3:14). Only when we remain with Jesus will we be able to do what he has called us to do. Jesus says in John 15, 'I am the true vine and you are the branches. Remain in me and I will remain in you. If you remain in me you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.' The point that Jesus makes is to remain in him on a daily basis without which we cannot be effective. The source of all our strength for doing ministry comes from Jesus.

In the ministry of Jesus we see a threefold pattern. He taught about the kingdom of God; he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom; healed every disease and drove out demons. Jesus was a good shepherd who had compassion on the crowds. They were like sheep without a shepherd running helter skelter without any direction. Sometimes our lives are very similar. We do not have a sense of direction and we are running here and there not knowing what to do. Jesus saw the great spiritual need of the people whose lives have no centre, whose existence seems aimless; whose experience is one of futility. The whole gospel is a response to just this universal human need. The problem was with the spiritual leadership of the people of Israel. They had failed to give direction to their people. Similarly, many at times pastors and church leaders have failed to give direction to their people.

After calling the disciples Jesus gives them instructions about their mission. They were primarily to go amongst the Jews. The mission had to begin from within. It begins with Israel and then goes out to the nations. Similarly, in our own lives the gospel should radically alter our lives before we take the mission to others. Secondly, the message was to preach that the kingdom of God has come near. John calls for repentance in order to enter into the kingdom. In anticipation of God's activity, which involves judgement as well as redemption, there can be only one clarion call: to turn, to return to the God of Israel. God continues to call us to repent of our sinful ways.

Thirdly, they are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy and drive out demons. They were to do this freely without any charge as they had received these gifts freely. The disciples were not to make profit out of their proclamation and ministry. In our world today many are ministering for profit. They are always looking to get paid like professionals for the service rendered. There is a note of warning for all of us as ministers that our ministry should not be aimed at profit.

Finally, they were not to take any gold, silver or copper with them. They were not meant to carry a bag for the journey or an extra shirt or sandals or a staff. The point made is that their baggage should not be a hindrance to them. Bare essentials were sufficient for the ministry. They were not to be anxious about their food and clothing as God will provide for them. He was sending them out as sheep among wolves and therefore they were to be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves. This warning goes out to each one of us as well. We will have opposition and therefore we are to be shrewd and anticipate and avoid danger. We are also to be innocent as doves. To have integrity that is prepared to suffer rather than compromise. May we pray that God will raise up many workers and commission them to do his work, for the harvest is plenty and the workers are few.